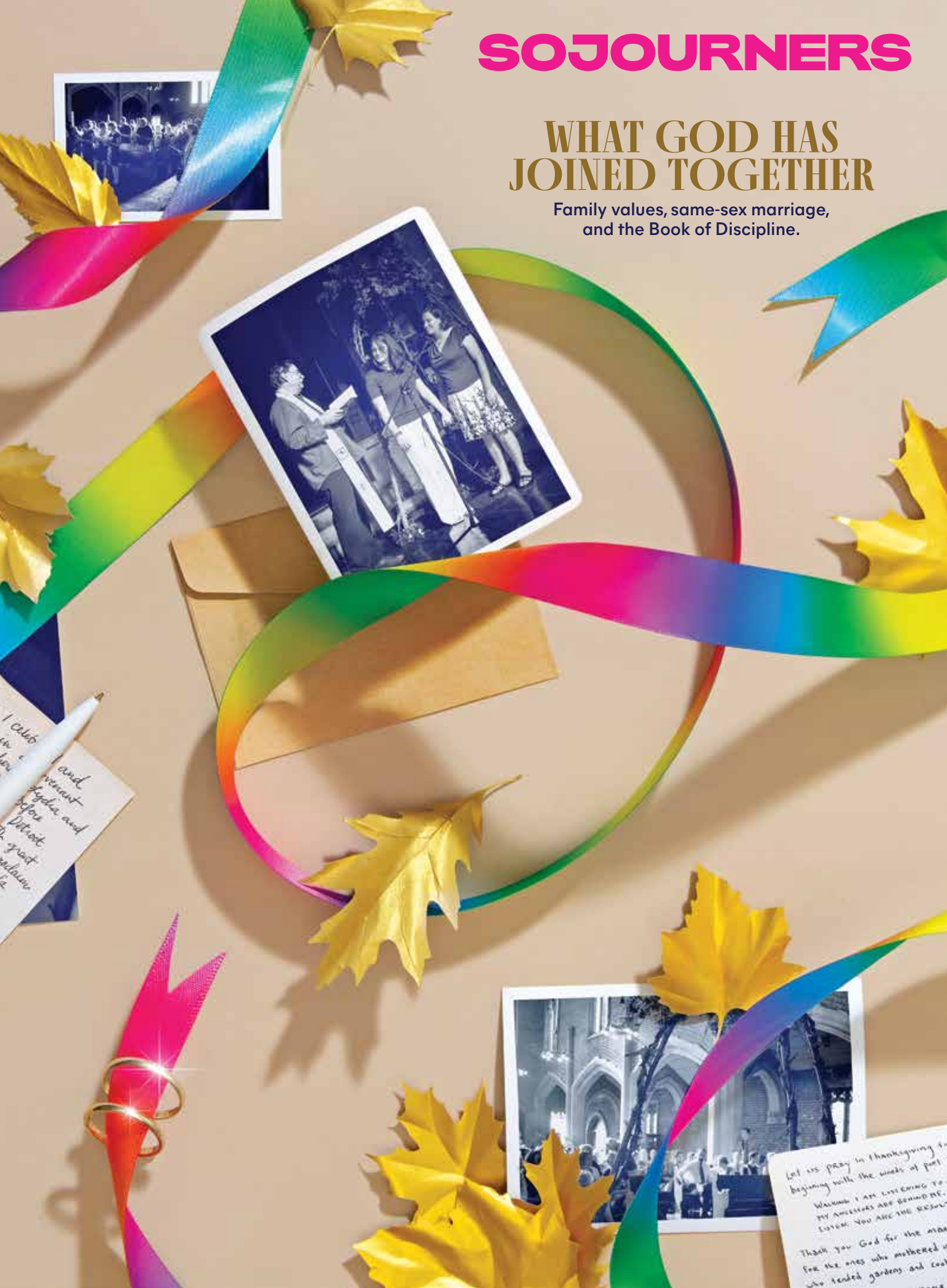


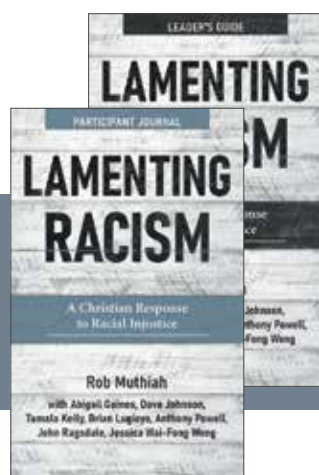
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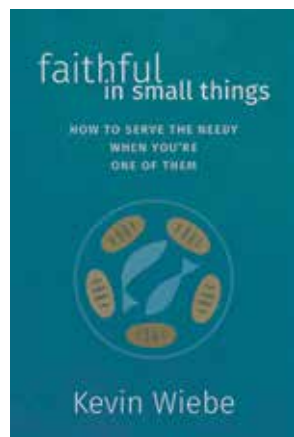
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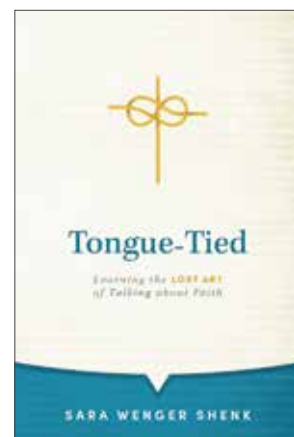
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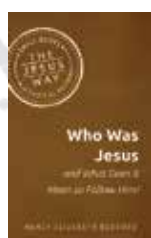
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From the Editor

Christian denominations in North America and around the world have been torn asunder around questions concerning the full inclusion of LGBTQ members. The United Methodist Church is no exception. When (or, because of COVID-19, *if*) the church gathers in August for its General Conference, the hottest topic on the table, in the words of UM News, is “the denomination’s intensifying debate around the status of LGBTQ Christians—which has already led multiple congregations to disaffiliate.”

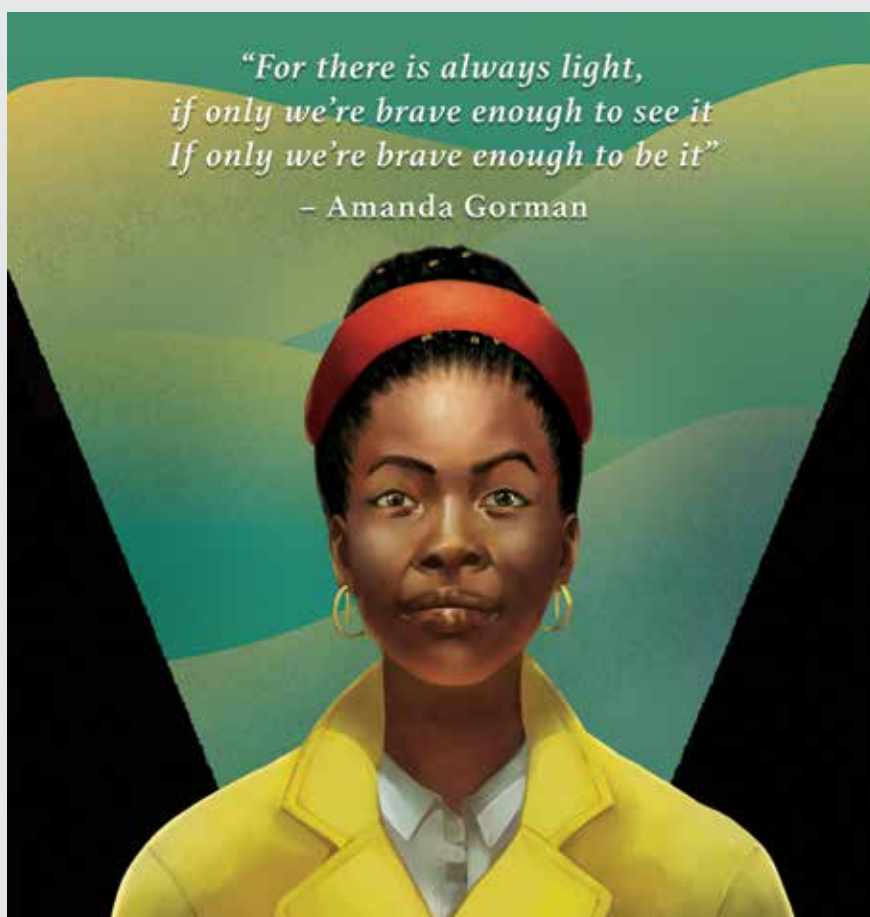
But for many pastors of local congregations—and, needless to say, for many individual Christians who love one another—questions of same-sex marriage aren’t, at heart, about church policy, doctrines, or books of discipline, as important as those ecclesial structures may be. They’re about covenant, and commitment, and pledging fidelity in the context of a faith community that loves them and holds them accountable—in other words, they’re about *marriage*. As Methodist pastor Bill Wylie-Kellermann and his daughter, Lydia Wylie-Kellermann, explain in our cover story, sometimes following the love ethic of Jesus requires trusting “the grace of God in Jesus Christ” and asking “the grace of [our] sisters and brothers in church and covenant.”

RESPONSE

Healing for the Soul and Spirit

In “God Is in the Making” (February 2021), Julie Polter writes about artist Makoto Fujimura, a respected painter who also practices *kintsugi*—the Japanese art of mending broken ceramics with lacquer mixed with precious metals. “I was inspired by [Polter’s] in-depth exploration of Fujimura’s art in the spiritual context of his work,” Cynthia Ranke responded by email. “This piece took her writing ability to a powerful new level, bordering on the profound, and healing for my soul and spirit.” Ann Yonemura  recommends this article to “anyone interested in reading a thoughtful reflection on art, theology, and our world.”

Write us: response@sojo.net



"THE ONLY
WAY TO
SURVIVE IS
BY TAKING
CARE OF
ONE
ANOTHER."

Grace Lee Boggs
Social activist

CONTRIBUTING



Miroslava Chávez-García

For many scholars of color, reconciling theory and praxis is the most challenging aspect of academia, explains Miroslava Chávez-García: "Nevertheless, we can be activists when we recover the stories that have been buried." A professor of history and Chicana/o studies, Chávez-García unpacks the long legacy of forced sterilizations in the U.S., including those allegedly carried out in ICE detention centers (p.14). The historical stories "serve as a base from which to carry out larger goals of organizing, educating, and empowering communities," Chávez-García says.



Party of One Studio

Melissa Deckert and Nicole Licht are the minds behind Party of One Studio. Together, they communicate creative vision through art, with photo-based illustrations and visual campaigns (cover, p. 22). Committed to bringing "joy" and "visual delight" to viewers of their work, Deckert and Licht say their communal creative process is "naturally symbiotic and democratic" and has become an "intuitive division of labor and energy."

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Number of diseases with vaccines available in the U.S.

45%

Adults in the U.S. who received a flu vaccine during the 2018-2019 flu season

302,329

Number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the U.S. on New Year's Day 2021

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

HOOP DREAMS

March is my favorite month of the year and not simply because of the renewal of spring. As a college basketball fanatic, it is also because of the NCAA men's tournament, otherwise known as March Madness. My passion for college hoops began when I moved to Tucson before my junior year of high school and started attending every home game at the University of Arizona, where college basketball is an obsession. In light of the hardship and devastation that this pandemic has inflicted, it feels overdramatic to say that my spirits were crushed last March when the NCAA made the necessary decision to pull the plug on the March Madness tournament. This year, the NCAA plans to host the tournament in a bubble, following the model of last summer's NBA playoffs. The tournament will feel incomplete without screaming fans, but the fact that it will take place at all offers a

**MARCH MADNESS—
AND THE ISRAELITES
IN THE DESERT—
OFFER LESSONS AS
WE EMERGE FROM
THE CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC.**

“TO DEFEAT COVID-19, WE WILL NEED TO TAP INTO SPIRITUAL GRIT AND PASSION.”

signal that the beginning of the end of the pandemic is within sight.

As our nation moves out of a long, dark winter of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths, we can all use a dose of something to look forward to, even if those somethings don't look identical to life before the pandemic. A bubbled March Madness feels like a fitting metaphor to the critically important space we will be in as vaccines help us turn the tide against this virus and toward a new normal. But the journey between the spring and fall will likely feel like a long and tortuous one, particularly if COVID-19 fatigue devolves into resentment, resignation, or at worst nihilism. With the advent of more contagious and possibly more deadly strains of the virus, social distancing and mask-wearing will be even more necessary to transition from the wilderness of the current pandemic into the promised land of a post-COVID-19 world.

We can glean lessons from the Israelites, who spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, traveling a distance that should have taken mere days had their journey not been derailed by their unfaithfulness,

rebellion, idolatry, and fear. The Israelite travails in the wilderness offer us a cautionary lesson: We must not allow selfish individualism, fear, or fatigue to sabotage the imperative to conquer COVID-19 by ensuring that the majority of the population gets vaccinated as soon as possible. This poses a critical test of pastoral leadership as our churches can play an instrumental role in encouraging congregants and community members to get vaccinated, overcoming distrust and disinformation. How we come through this COVID-19 wilderness will set the stage for the radically more humane world that we must create beyond the pandemic.

While it is too early to make predictions about the NCAA tournament, I can say with a high degree of confidence that this year's March Madness will feel like a balm for sports fans and a bridge between our present situation and the post-quarantine reality on the horizon. Among the most inspiring staples of the NCAA tournament each year are the runs that Cinderella teams so often make. These are underdog teams that go deep into the tournament, busting brackets and upsetting superior teams with their stellar play and pure grit. To defeat COVID-19, we will need to tap into a similar degree of spiritual grit and passion, knowing that our sacrifice and perseverance will benefit everyone, particularly the most vulnerable. ✦

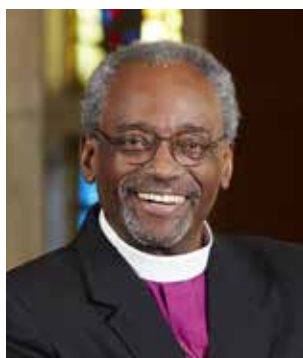


Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners.

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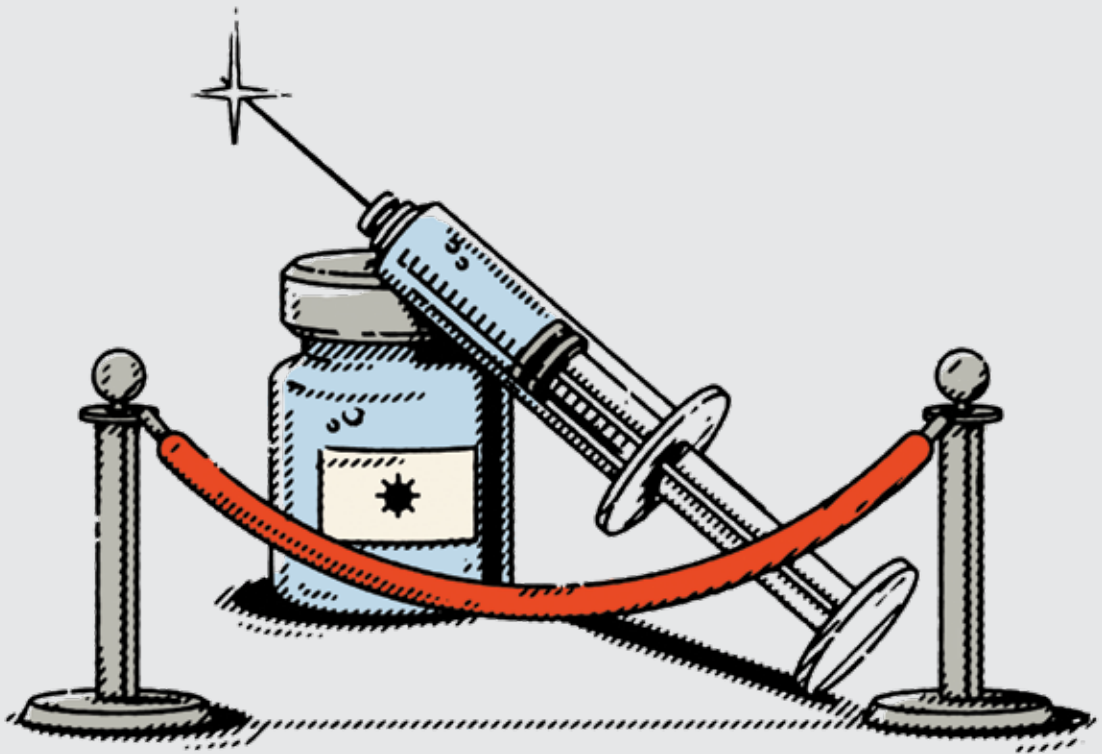
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WHO SHOULD BE FIRST IN LINE?

Christian ethics offers guidance on how to distribute the vaccine.



2

According to psychologists, fairness is one of our most innate moral intuitions. As a parent, I can vouch for this because I routinely navigate the extra-sensitive fairness meters of bickering siblings. Young or old, we protest perceived slights in the same terms: “That is so unfair!”

This snap judgment, however, is not always accurate. Consequently, when circumstances trigger a reflexive accusation of unfairness, we should pause to verify that we are not off base. As Christians, especially, we must test our gut reactions against the insights of our faith to ensure that our intuitions match our convictions.

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine is a paradigmatic illustration of this responsibility.

With a limited supply likely deep into 2021, many who want the vaccine will be unable to get it for quite some time. Recognizing this reality, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has created guidelines for who should have priority at each stage of the rollout. According to ACIP, health

care workers and residents of long-term care facilities have priority, and after that essential workers and those over 75 should have access before anyone else.

For those who do not fall into the earliest priority groups, the temptation to cry “unfair!” will be omnipresent. But is this indictment really justified?

The issue, of course, comes down to what we mean by fairness, a term so closely related to the idea of justice that the 20th century political philosopher John Rawls crafted an entire theory of justice as fairness. Christian thinkers have historically preserved the classic notion of justice as giving to each person his or her due. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “Just as love of God includes love of our neighbor ... so too the service of God includes rendering to each one [their] due.” Biblical justice, meanwhile, emphasizes the restoration of right relationship. By either measure, there is a strong argument to be made in support of ACIP’s recommendations.

Think back to March 2020, when the United States experienced its most intense period of lockdown. Anyone who could work from home did, but not everyone had that luxury. Many workers—disproportionately those who identify as people of color, which is no coincidence—were told they had to show up on the job because their labor was “essential.” In effect, we asked these grocery store employees, bus drivers, first responders, and others to subject themselves to the risk of infection so that society could function as normally as possible.

While most essential workers have not experienced the worst symptoms of COVID-19, not all were that lucky. Of all U.S. adults in high-risk categories for COVID-19, 41 percent are essential workers who cannot work from home. In all cases, we collectively asked these people to make the very sacrifices that the rest of us worked so hard to avoid. Worse, we left them defenseless in the process, because there was not enough protective equipment to meet the demand.

Christians in particular cannot look askance at this situation, for as the biblical scholar John R. Donahue explains, “Concern for the defenseless in society is not a command designed simply to promote social harmony, but is rooted in the nature of Yahweh ... who is a defender of the oppressed.” We have a covenant with

**WE ASKED THEM TO MAKE
SACRIFICES THAT THE REST OF
US WORKED HARD TO AVOID.**

the worker just as much as we have one with our elders, and we must honor it if we wish to restore right relationship in society. As a matter of justice, we owe them something for the hazards we asked them to endure.

To give essential workers—in health care and beyond—the next priority for the vaccine is not, therefore, an injustice rooted in age discrimination against those under 75. It is a just acknowledgment of the sacrifices they have made and a belated reaffirmation of the fundamental Christian tenet that every human being is equally made in the image and likeness of God.

For those of us farther down the waiting list, let our patience be our contribution to this overdue pursuit of equity and social justice. ❖

Conor M. Kelly teaches theological ethics at Marquette University in Wisconsin.

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SOJOURNERS

COMMENTARY

BY MIROSLAVA CHÁVEZ-GARCÍA



A CRUEL AND APPALLING OVERREACH

The tragic history of forced sterilization.

In September 2020, reports emerged from the Irwin County Detention Center, an immigration facility in Georgia, detailing forced hysterectomies performed on migrant women held in custody. An Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in Ocilla, Ga., owned and managed by LaSalle Corrections, a private prison company, oversaw these surgeries in what have been described as appalling conditions and an “utter lack of care of detainees’ health” during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Tragically, as too many people fail to realize, forced sterilizations are not a recent development. Rather, as a form of state violence they date back more than 100 years, when states across the country (beginning in 1907 with Indiana and followed in 1909 by Washington, California, and Connecticut, as well as many others over time) approved “eugenic sterilization.” These early laws passed by state legislatures allowed state officials to sterilize males and females—some as young as 12 or 13 years old—believed to have inheritable and incurable diseases or afflictions, including insanity, mania, or dementia.

In subsequent years, those laws were relaxed and expanded when the hereditary requirement was removed, giving state medical officials wide discretion in determining what constituted “perverse” behaviors. These included everything from “feble-mindedness” (defined as having the maximum mental capacity of a 12-year-old), schizophrenia, manic depression, psychosis, epilepsy, or “sexual perversion” (including homosexuality, gender nonconformity, sex outside of marriage, and syphilis).

Those with disabilities, such as blindness, deafness, and physical deformities, did not escape the operating table.

In so-called progressive states, particularly California, tens of thousands of people were sterilized without their or their parents or custodians’ consent. Between 1909 and 1979 (when sterilization laws were repealed or amended), California conducted 20,000 of the 60,000 recorded sterilizations nationwide. Researchers, such as Alexandra Minna Stern, author of the 2005 book *Eugenic Nation*, believe many more were carried out in private clinics and hospitals across the Golden State. But without access to medical records, one can only speculate on the extent of victimization.

Equally tragic is that the *most* vulnerable members of society have fallen, and continue to fall, victim to eugenic sterilization. Poor, undereducated, and marginalized women of color—specifically African American, Mexican and Mexican American, Native American, and Puerto Rican women—have been sterilized against their consent in disproportionate numbers. Gender-nonconforming people and impoverished white women, particularly unmarried mothers and those with many children, have been singled out as well.

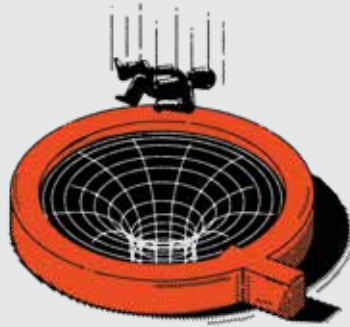
In recent decades, Spanish-speaking women on state support, Native women on federal reservations, African American women in prisons, and migrant women have fallen prey to the U.S. federal detention apparatus. This system too often functions above and beyond the law, despite the beliefs of advocates that forced sterilization violates the Constitution, as well as the Hippocratic Oath, the ethical code for physicians. In the process, these women and their families have experienced years of loss and shame. Most people, often including the victims’ families, are unaware of this history, as the 2015 documentary *No Más Bebés/No More Babies*, by Rene Tajima-Peña and Virginia Espino, makes painfully clear.

We must remain vigilant in naming and stopping the ongoing overreach by the state in sterilizing poor and vulnerable migrant women. Our belief in the sanctity of human life, our faith in humanity, and, above all, our future depend on it. ❖

Miroslava Chávez-García teaches at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

F

APOCALYPTIC VISIONS AND Q CHRISTIANS



For more than a century, evangelical Christians in the United States have frequently and variously imagined an apocalyptic upheaval that would usher in a new world. Evangelicals have had no shortage of appetite for cataclysmic stories, though they have differing interpretations of the biblical texts that describe the “end times,” as demonstrated by the popular appeal of the *Left Behind* series in the early 2000s. This craving is evident in the way that Christian visions of a final battle between the forces of darkness and light have been woven together with the conspiratorial narratives of QAnon.

In the U.S., Australia, and elsewhere, the far-right conspiracy theory QAnon is growing rapidly among New Age adherents and anti-vaccination communities. However, as religion reporter Katelyn Beaty has noted, there is explicitly Christian-sounding language in QAnon messaging. Explicit examples of the blending of Christian apocalyptic language and the QAnon conspiracies can be found in web posts and books published in the wake of the alleged “revelations” of the anonymous web poster “Q.” In these texts, Donald Trump is often presented as God’s anointed, an equivalent to King Cyrus, battling the diabolical forces of the “Deep State” (a conspiracy theory that posits a hidden government working within the legitimately elected government). The Deep State—supposedly composed of individuals such as Hillary Clinton, Pope Francis, and well-known celebrities who are often described as demonically controlled—is said to be guilty of the most savage crimes, including child sex trafficking and using their victims’ blood to extend their own lives.

Incorporating older tropes from 18th-century European Illuminati nar-

atives and “blood libel” legends common in historic Christian anti-Semitism, Q believers cling to the most common narrative motif of conspiracy theories: the belief that the evil conspirators will be defeated, in this case by “God’s chosen representative,” Trump. Q believers expected a violent conflict between Trump loyalists and the Deep State in which the latter would be overthrown, ushering in a new age for America and the world.

Even after Trump’s election loss, so-called Q Christians held out hope that God would reveal the full plan and that the Deep State would be struck down by extra-constitutional means. When Trump’s supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, many of them were confident this “cleansing” was underway. Arizonan Jacob Chansley, the infamous QAnon “shaman” with a horned headdress and Norse-inspired tattoos, led a small group in prayer while standing behind the president of the Senate’s desk, thanking “our Heavenly Father” for the “inspiration” to “get rid of the tyrants, the communists, and the globalists.”

As early-Christianity historian Elaine Pagels has explained, Christians can see more than violence and death in the narratives of Revelation and other apocalyptic scriptures. However, the prevalence of blood and wrath in these biblical visions, now resonant with QAnon, begs the question of Christians today: What visions do you reveal in? Do you truly long for peace? Or is your hope for God’s reign merely an alibi that masks a delight in fantasies of the slaughter that supposedly must precede it?

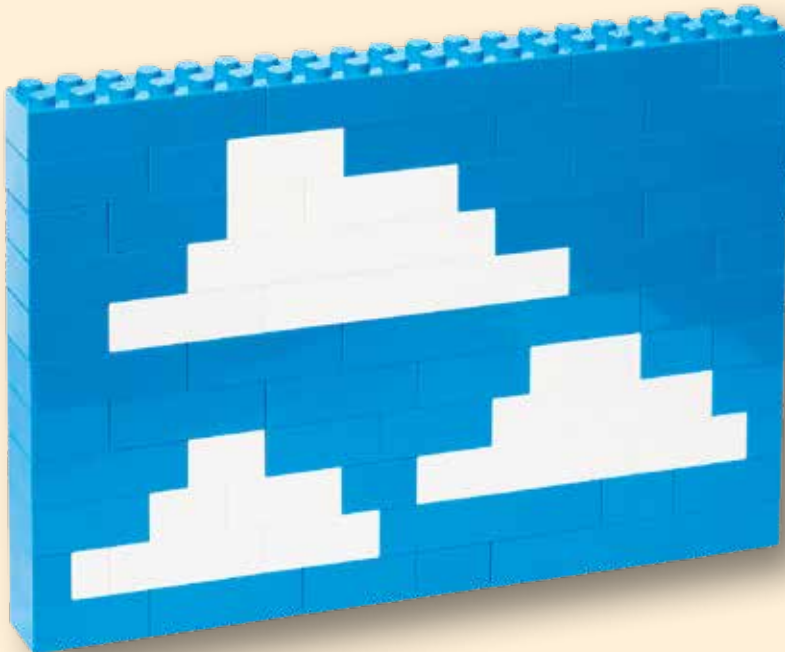
The answers to these questions can reveal a deeper lesson about what Christians imagine the reign of God to be and what is required to establish it. ❖

**Q CHRISTIANS
HOPED THAT GOD
WOULD REVEAL THE
FULL PLAN.**

Damon T. Berry, author of *Blood and Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism*, is assistant professor of religious studies at St. Lawrence University in New York.

BEYOND A SURVIVAL MENTALITY

3



Habits are formed in response to contextual cues. The stronger the cue, the harder it is for our minds to access alternative responses.

We just spent four years resisting. We became experts at pushing back, filling public squares, locking arms. Some of us also built habits of self-care. We would receive the cue for a big justice push and, without thinking, plan a day of hibernation on the other side. These habits were (and are) beautiful and necessary. But now we live in a new context. The old cues that triggered those habits will come less and less frequently. It is entirely possible that a year from now we could find ourselves coasting on autopilot rather than establishing new habits of dreaming and building what we dream.

By the end of the Civil War, 4 million enslaved people of African descent were sustaining themselves with survival habits cultivated and passed down over the course of 250 years. They found themselves in a brand-new context on April 10, 1865. Survival was no longer the highest goal. Now they were free to dream.

Dream they did. Over the next decade, formerly enslaved peoples dreamed and built the infrastructure of African American community

**WE CAN'T FIND GOD'S DREAM
FOR US UNTIL WE ALLOW
OURSELVES TO THINK
BEYOND THE POSSIBLE.**

life. We dreamt the Freedman's Bureau, Howard University, women's and men's societies, and church denominations. More than 1,000 Black people dreamed of leadership and ran for public office—and won!

Not every dream is meant to be lived, but we can't find God's dream for us until we allow ourselves to think beyond the possible. For example, I never thought I could own a home, but I was inspired by a story I learned while researching my family for my next book. My great-grandfather Hiram Lawrence's family had been chased out of Kentucky by the Klan. He moved to Philadelphia and bought a block of homes in a neighborhood called Elmwood, renting them during the 1940s to African Americans streaming north in the Great Migration. Then the city of Philadelphia claimed his land by eminent domain. Now it rests under I-95, adjacent to the Philadelphia airport.

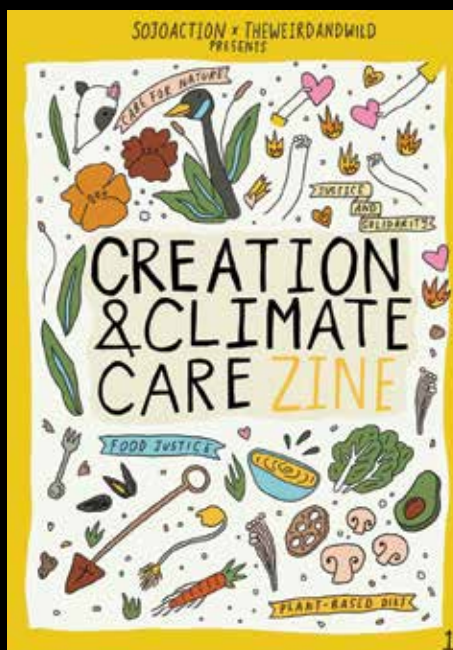
I had shut out the dream of owning my own home. It seemed beyond my paycheck. Then one day I was examining a map, trying to find the land where Hiram had lived. I found it, but also noticed numbers all over the map. It turned out to be a Zillow real estate map. I couldn't believe how affordable the homes were. I searched in my grandmother's neighborhood close by and found the same situation—affordable, renovated homes. I set up accounts with Zillow and Realtor.com. I contacted a real estate agent. I wasn't sure I could do it, but I was willing to dream. The process of searching released me from my own survival mentality, helping me to see beyond the possible.

Now, I live in my dream home—literally. I live one block from where my grandparents and great-grandparents owned homes. I've returned to the old neighborhood, called to seek its peace.

It is time to build new habits for a new context. What would goodness look like in your life? In your family? In your community? In our nation? Dare to dream it. Then build it. ✕

Lisa Sharon Harper is president of FreedomRoad.us and the author of several books, including the forthcoming *Fortune*, the story of her family and a call for reparations.

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THE HUNGRY SPIRIT

BY ROSE MARIE BERGER

THE SOUND AND THE FURY



F

For me, **fury** has a face. In 1999, I sat in a refugee camp with Kosovar families. They had been driven from their homes ahead of attacking Serb crowds aroused to violence by the cruel and charismatic oratory of then-president Slobodan Milosevic.

Thirty-year-old Hajrija thrust forward this question: “How can I live with this pain that our neighbors who we shared our bread with, who my husband shoveled

snow from her walk even before he cleared our own ... asked aloud, in our yard while I was hanging my laundry, how she was going to kill me and my children? She was trying to decide between mortar or sniper. How can I go back and live with this person?” Hajrija was incandescent with fury.

On Jan. 6 this year, I saw the other side of Hajrija’s story—the spectacle of an attacking crowd. Several thousand gathered in front of the White House under the sway of another cruel and charismatic president. Like all such leaders, he deceived the crowd by saying their sacred rights had been stolen; that the enemy wants to “indoctrinate” their children; that if they did not act, the enemy would “illegally take over our country.” He loaded the crowd, aimed them at Congress—then gave the command.

In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti’s psychological study of mob violence, he explains that when a man gives a death-laden command to a crowd, “the anxiety of command increases in him until it results in catastrophe. But before catastrophe overtakes *him* it will have engulfed innumerable others.”

In the videos of that crowd’s catastrophic attack on the U.S. Capitol, they howl to “hang Mike Pence” with scaffold and noose at the ready; a

man’s voice sings a sinister tune to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, “Where are you, Nancy?” as a predator might lure a vulnerable child. The faces in the crowd hold a series of emotions: expectation, freedom, satisfaction, confusion, religious ecstasy.

We watched the crowd press in on its victims: Screams from an officer pinned in a door. The peculiarly American nightmare of Eugene Goodman’s aloneness with white men on his heels. Voices whispering into cell phones for help. Five people died. Two more died by suicide in the days following. More than 140 police officers were injured.

Then there’s all that the cameras don’t capture about the survivors. Nightmares and nausea, constant pacing and prolonged motionlessness, an inability to focus, exhaustion and insomnia, an unrelenting premonition of danger. In other words: their trauma.

Jean-Baptiste Talla, a Catholic Relief Services’ adviser who specializes in building social cohesion in divided communities, told me that following an event like the Jan. 6 attack, painful memory and the dangers of a single narrative keep people afraid of others. They have wounds to the soul and psyche.

In the social cohesion practices Talla leads around the world, he says they prefer to talk about “trauma awareness” rather than “trauma healing” because all community members are affected by violent attacks and need a community approach rather than individual psychological aid. The individual and community must be aware of how trauma is behaving as they work to overcome their fear, rebuild trust, restore channels of communication, and eventually learn to dream again together.

Fury, like that of Hajrija or survivors of the Capitol attack, can be tempered into courage and the will to survive. But without a practice to manage trauma, develop shared safety, and implement change, fury may simply burn a person or community to the ground.

In the absence of any satisfying conclusion to this unfolding story, I turn in hope to poet Amanda Gorman: “We ignite not in the light, but in lack thereof, / For it is in loss that we truly learn to love. / In this chaos, we will discover clarity. / In suffering, we must find solidarity.”

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Bending the Arch*, is senior editor of *Sojourners*.

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EYEWITNESS

4



**"SOME THINGS WE
 HAVE TO COMPOST,
 BUT THAT'S BETTER
 THAN THE LANDFILL."**

A DUMPSTER OF RICHES

"We have enough food in this country to feed an entire other United States, but it's going to waste before it gets to people's tables. It feels crazy to me that with so many people going hungry, the U.S. is wasting close to half of the food that is produced. It's hard to do anything on an empty stomach.

A year and a half ago, we started dumpster diving. Since then, we've seen an obscene amount of food being wasted. We've been able to feed our family of three almost entirely on dumpster-diving food, and feed other families we know are food insecure. Often there's even more than they can eat.

We had to kiss a few frogs before we found the dumpster that we really liked. Generally, we go out at night after grocery stores close. While it's not illegal to dumpster dive, it is technically trespassing. Dumpster diving etiquette is to be respectful of the business and leave the site as clean or cleaner than you found it. We just reach in and pull things out. Sometimes [my husband] Craig will use a pick-up stick—you push a little button and it clamps on like a Go Go Gadget arm. We wash everything with a water-and-vinegar solution. Some things we have to compost, but that's better than the landfill.

Our last Thanksgiving dinner was entirely dumpster dove: a whole smoked turkey, sweet potatoes, green beans, and roasted potatoes. There was even a pumpkin pie in there, and fresh cranberries that I made into sauce.

We had a daily practice of saying a little prayer of gratitude. And now, with all the bad news over the last [year], we look at what's in front of us and say, 'And here is this bounty; here is this bounty that was rescued to be on our table and that we have gotten to share with others. Thank you again for all the farmers, the workers, and those who shipped it, and the dumpster for providing it.'"

Jackie Parker rescues food with her husband, Craig Hargett, in Raleigh, N.C. She spoke with Sojourners' Jenna Barnett.





WHAT GOES JOINED TOGETHER

» WHEN FAMILY VALUES CLASH WITH
THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE. «

OD HAS TOGETHER

BY LYDIA AND BILL
WYLIE-KELLERMANN



I

In August, leaders of the United Methodist Church from around the world are scheduled to meet, in Minneapolis and/or online.

The denomina-

tion's future will be on the table as delegates address the decades-old debate about full inclusion of LGBTQI members, including in same-sex marriage and ordination. Meanwhile, congregations around the U.S. and elsewhere have taken various approaches to the pastoral realities of their members. Lydia Wylie-Kellermann and her father, retired Methodist pastor Bill Wylie-Kellermann, explain what it meant to support each other through Lydia's wedding and the ecclesial reverberations that followed.

Lydia Wylie-Kellermann: This is a story about risk and fear. It is a story about love. And it's about the moments when standing beside the ones you love becomes an act of justice. It is the kind of story that begs us to ask what it means to be church. It is an ordinary story turned holy by the common occurrence of the very personal moments of our lives interacting with structural injustice and the way resistance and love unfold.

Ten years ago, I married Erinn. It was in a political moment when gay marriage was illegal and most denominations were still forbidding it.

Yet we were clear that we were not merely roommates or partners, but that marriage was a vocation we were summoned to together. We had no doubt that our relationship was blessed by community and by God. We wanted to promise our lives to one another and publicly offer our marriage as a gift back upon community.

It was a moment of total clarity for me, yet it was also really scary. We had to climb the steps of the church fearing we would pass through a line of protesters. We entered the sanctuary feeling the loved ones missing in the pews because they couldn't support our marriage. We walked hand in hand down the aisle, combatting our own internalized homophobia, showing our love publicly with hands, promises, and kisses.

We could not have done it without the love of community. The dearly beloveds who filled that church held our hearts and knees steady.

One of those people that stood beside us

and laid his hands upon us was my dad. He loved us, celebrated us, and summoned God to move in and through the day and into the rest of our lives. He co-officiated our service. As an ordained Methodist pastor serving a spunky, activist Episcopal church, he was risking losing his orders and losing his job.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann: Those were real fears. For as long as I can remember, I had said to myself that if a member of my congregation asked me to preside at a same-sex wedding, one discerned in pastoral care, that I would certainly do it. I was navigating a contradiction in the United Methodist Book of Discipline that enjoined me to offer pastoral ministry to all members in my care but a couple of paragraphs later

forbade me to offer sacramental care to particular parishioners. This marriage was essentially pastoral work, but one that functioned as a public action of civil and ecclesial disobedience. I took comfort in Jesus' ministry, where a personal act of healing would publicly violate Levitical laws of purity, say, putting him in trouble.

Consequences were unknown. Pastors in other conferences had been defrocked or suspended, but this was a first in Michigan, so untested.

Let me add something learned in discerning nonviolent direct actions: Fears can actually be in the service of the Holy Spirit. Often as not, the thing you are afraid of is the very thing you are being called to do. Acknowledged or confessed, fears may



“THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE ENJOINED ME TO OFFER PASTORAL MINISTRY TO *ALL* MEMBERS IN MY CARE.”

—BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN

“Will you come with me?”

My dad stood beside me when I got married in what he declared a gospel act, and now it was time for me to stand beside him for an ordinary and sacred action that I believe was also a gospel act. Yes! It was a no-brainer. This time, I would love him, celebrate him, and summon God to linger in the corners of that conference building.

I showed up that day with knees quivering, holding the full intention of being an emotional, spiritual, and physical support to my dad. But it was immediately clear that I was not supposed to be there. I had to be navigated around. My presence changed the conversation.

Simply by sitting awkwardly at the long wooden table, we managed to humanize

the conversation. It was not as easy to talk about “homosexuals” harming the church when they had to look into my eyes and speak of my love and my life.

My dad was being accused of “harming the Discipline.” Simply with our presence and clarity, we rearranged the question of who was being harmed. For generations, LGBTQI people have been hurt, excluded, and abused in our churches. We have been told that we can’t be who we are and that to God our existence is criminal and sinful. The mere fact that my marriage was listed in the Discipline—sandwiched between the crimes of racism, pedophilia, and adultery—speaks volumes to how we have been seen in the church.

Bill: That day, they set before me a document that I could sign and walk—acknowledging that I had violated the Discipline and promising not to do so again. They expected I would take the deal, but I pushed it away. I didn’t want to rest on the sort of “family exceptionalism” it seemed to offer. Plus, my conviction was such that I would do it again (and have).

My surprise came when the bishop turned things around and asked that we return in a week with our own proposal for a “just resolution.”

Both of us were aware of how denial of marriage had been employed, with complicity from the church, in a history of various oppressions. Enslaved people were denied marriage, as it might stand in the way of quick and easy sale—which is to say, the only legal relationship was

point the way. Suppressed or denied, they become inflated and, in the service of the powers, hold you back.

So, I put the church on notice, sending my bishop a letter in advance. Charges were filed against me immediately by his cabinet, and I was summoned to appear on a date certain, to begin an administrative process, or eventually trial.

Lydia: The summoning letter from the bishop arrived and indicated that my dad was to bring a support person. Usually, when your orders are at risk, you might wisely choose to bring a prominent pastor or even a church lawyer. But he walked over to my house with worried, furrowed brow, stood in my living room, and said,



with the master. (Hence, enslaved people developed underground and alternative rituals, such as jumping the broom). Denying interracial marriage in Jim Crow and years beyond functioned similarly, to justify and regulate segregation.

So, on the day appointed, we brought a document that included reflection on Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham jail letter, detailing civil (and by analogy, in this case, ecclesial) disobedience, how breaking unjust laws or disciplinary paragraphs is justified, where the harm was caused by the law itself rather than by its violation.

It set forth a proposal for a restorative justice process, inviting LGBTQI folks, representatives both from congregations actively opposing same-sex marriage and "reconciling congregations," members of the bishop's cabinet and the conference Board of Ordained Ministry, plus ourselves.

It also included a "signable confession," to which I'd gladly put my hand:

On Oct. 8, 2011, I celebrated and participated fully in a covenant service of worship wherein Lydia and Erinn married one another before friends and community in Detroit. I did this wholeheartedly with great joy, and praying in it to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's great love, to offer a witness of restorative justice, to be faithful to my calling as pastor and elder, to honor the sacred covenant of ordination under which I share, even to support and maintain the Discipline of the United Methodist Church, and to be accountable to the bishop, the

order, and the Discipline—though in doing so I was fully mindful that I violated a provision of par. 2702.1b. In all these intentions I trust the grace of God in Jesus Christ and ask the grace of my sisters and brothers in church and covenant.

The bishop accepted it all. To be honest, the restorative process, well enough designed, was poorly implemented by the conference—powerful testimony rendered almost perfunctory. It did, however, provide a foundation for more recent cases in our church and contributed to a gathering denominational storm.

Lydia: The wedding now feels like a long time ago. It is hard to remember the fear I felt that day because the political moment changed so quickly. Within a couple of years, gay marriage was made legal across the country. I've often looked back and thought how far we've come in such a short time.

And then the world shifted under our feet again. These last four years have been agonizing as we moved into a time when hate crimes were sanctioned and even summoned by our then-president. Two summers ago, in Detroit, neo-Nazis marched down Woodward Avenue to the Pride Festival carrying shields and guns and shouting "F*** the faggots." The next day, I held my fears as Erinn prepared to take our 3- and 6-year-olds to the Pride Parade. Yes, it would be good for our kids to go. Yes, it was important political work just to show up. But I cannot deny that when we went through metal detectors to

"WE HAD NO DOUBT THAT OUR RELATIONSHIP WAS BLESSED BY COMMUNITY AND BY GOD."

—LYDIA WYLIE-KELLERMANN

get into Hart Plaza, I was disturbed by my own gratitude for the enhanced security.

Over the last year, the violent threats have loomed in the light. White men carry guns and nooses protesting stay-at-home orders. Black Lives Matter participants experience the real possibility of guns being fired at them. Black folks and particularly trans folks are being lynched. White supremacy, coupled with homophobia and transphobia, has been given permission to publicly arm itself and commit murder in the streets.

Stories of fear, risk, and courage are still crucial and urgent—they summon us to ask the questions: Where are we showing up? Who is at our table? What places of fear am I called to walk into with courage? For what am I willing to risk my job, my home, my reputation, my life? In this time of hate and violence, what does it mean to be church?

Bill: In United Methodism, the storm finally broke. Preparations have been made for a formal split in our denomination. The unity of the church, indeed of all humanity and even creation, is central to the gospel. Sacramental marriage may even be an emblem of it. Ironically, commitment to that unity can involve drawing clear lines.

I think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in this regard. From the moment that the Aryan clause was imposed on the German church, which forbade ordination to those who would marry spouses of Jewish descent, and those who were themselves of Jewish descent, Bonhoeffer thought the gospel so assaulted by it that a *status confessionis* existed—cause for declaring separation. Others, such as Karl Barth, argued for going slow, and eventually when the separation occurred, it did more fully address the theological idols of Nazism. But the impetus





was there from the beginning.

I am among those who hold that foreseeable separation in Methodism is an opportunity to gather a new church, committed not just to LGBTQI inclusion but to gospel nonviolence in ways that mark resistance to everything from white male supremacy to militarism and nuclear weapons and to the economic structures of poverty. The queer community is leading us into that.

A new generation of young Methodists is laying the groundwork for this work of transformation. They seek an intersectional church that is the beloved community—one committed to the nonviolence of Jesus; a sanctuary and safe space for those

targeted and vulnerable to assault; one that takes liturgy and witness to the streets and embraces shalom—truly a justice and peace church. That is the opportunity of our moment as United Methodists. And it's all right on time for this cultural and historical moment.

Lydia: Indeed, we are right on time, in that it is always the moment to reimagine church in the shape of the gospels. May we summon the ancestors and ancient stories that prod our dreaming and remind us who we are and where we come from. May we listen to folks on the margins who are so often on the edges of institutional church and yet seem to understand within their

bones what it means to be church. May we listen for the Creator who dwells in our fears and reminds us of our courage. And may my life and your life and all our lives be gathered up with all creation and force justice to roll down like a mighty stream. ✦

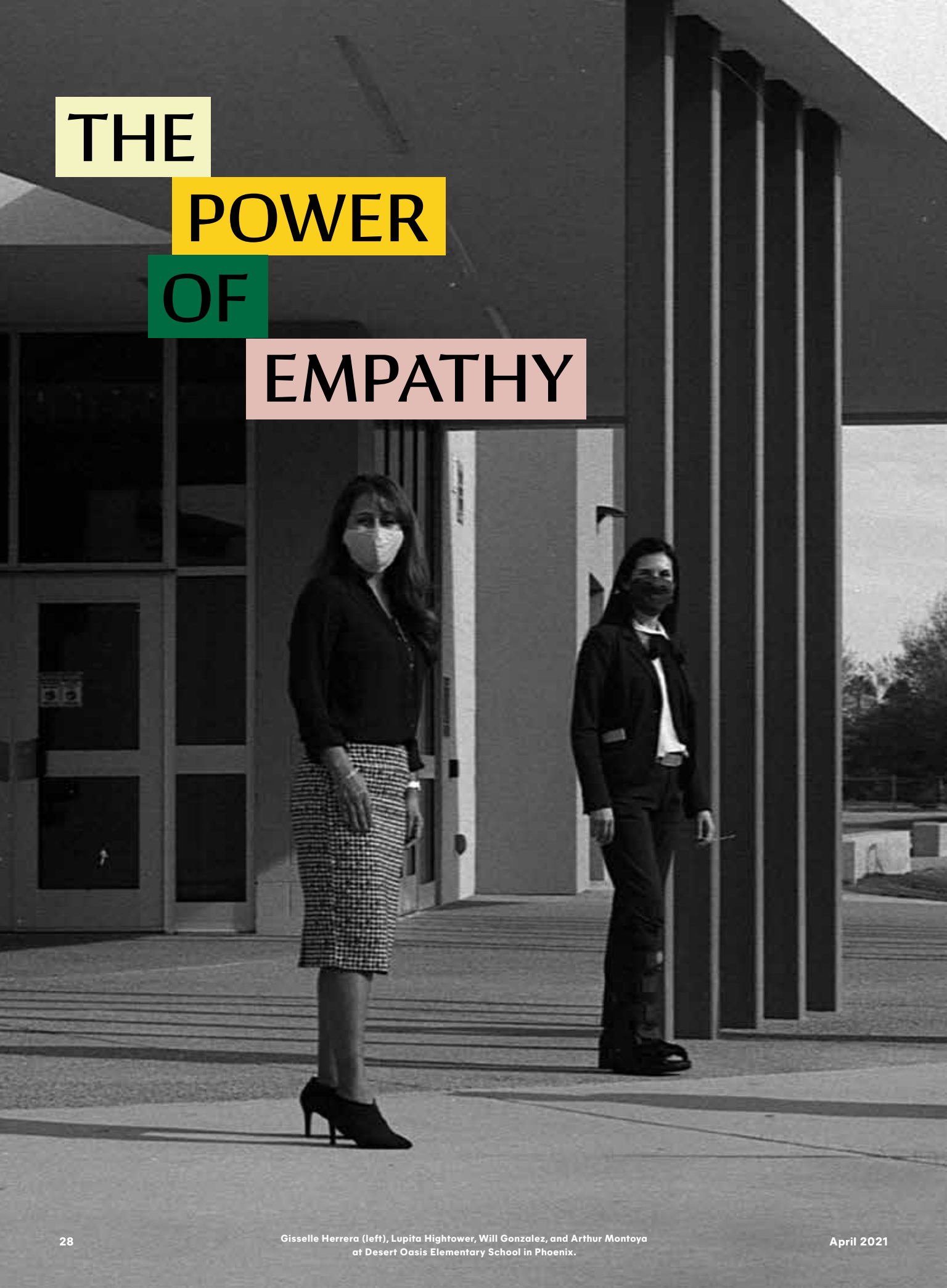
Lydia Wylie-Kellermann is editor of *Geez* magazine. She recently edited *The Sandbox Revolution: Raising Kids for a Just World* (Broadleaf, 2021). She lives in Detroit. **Bill Wylie-Kellermann** is a retired Methodist pastor, nonviolent community activist, teacher, and author. His next book is forthcoming this summer: *Celebrant's Flame: Daniel Berrigan in Memory and Reflection* (Cascade, 2021).

THE

POWER

OF

EMPATHY





The Phoenix Restorative Justice Center helps schools and communities find healthy ways to resolve conflict.

**TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY MITCHELL ATENCIO**

In 1974, two teenagers went on a vandalism spree in the quiet community of Elmira, Ontario. They slashed car tires, broke store windows, and destroyed a garden gazebo, racking up about \$3,000 worth of damage. The pair faced jail time for malicious vandalism. Instead, their parole officer, Mark Yanzi, who was also part of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada, asked the presiding judge if the youths could meet their victims face to face. This, they said, would allow the offenders to apologize directly and pay for damages. The judge agreed—setting legal precedent in Canada.

Though Indigenous and First Nations communities have a long history of similar conflict resolution practices, the Elmira case is seen as a moment when formalized restorative justice models, known at the time as victim-offender reconciliation programs (VORP), entered the Canadian criminal legal system. And Mennonite Christians were integral from the beginning.

In a 1989 handbook, *VORP Organizing: A foundation in the church*, Ron Claassen, Howard Zehr, and Duane Ruth-Heffebower further developed the concept of VORP as a program that could work in cooperation with the judicial system but embodied “different assumptions about crime and punishment.”

“True justice requires that things be made right between the one offended and the one who has done the offending. It embodies a concept of restoration—of victim as well as offender. This also implies personal accountability on the part of the offender, who is encouraged to acknowledge his or her responsibility for the harm, participate in deciding what needs to be done, and to take steps to make amends,” they wrote.

By the year 2000, there were more than 1,000 victim-offender reconciliation programs in North America and Europe.

TRYING SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN ARIZONA

The Phoenix Restorative Justice Center is one example of how the field of restorative justice has expanded into different settings.

Will Gonzalez was a frustrated community prosecutor in Phoenix who found himself baffled by the way schools treated students. He had seen firsthand that



schools did not have a proper understanding of how to help middle schoolers and junior high students. Because the schools based discipline on a “three-strike” system, they were quick to suspend and expel students, Gonzalez said.

“The only reason we have these laws out there that are three strikes is because somebody has an affinity for baseball,” Gonzalez told *Sojourners*. “They apply ideas that they borrow from criminal justice to kids, with no science behind it.”

These suspensions and expulsions left kids in Gonzalez’s community vulnerable to participating in gang and criminal activity. The “problem” community in town would remain stuck in a cycle of violence.

Gonzalez began to look for a way to break this cycle in the Phoenix communities where he worked. His research led him to Reedley, Calif., where Mennonite Central Committee had a vibrant restorative justice program. Along with better grades and test scores and reduced suspensions, Gonzalez saw an entirely different mindset and approach to school discipline.

“If you’re a schoolteacher and you’ve got kids who aren’t paying attention to you, or you feel like they’re being disrespectful, it’s really easy to get rid of those kids. Whether it’s conscious or unconscious, you start out with this mindset,” Gonzalez said. “You factor in the unconscious bias, then what do you have? You have a disproportionality of kids who are minorities being suspended, referred, or expelled out of school.”

Eventually, Gonzalez created the Phoenix Restorative Justice Center. The center’s director, Arthur Montoya, was raised in Surprise, Ariz., where his parents were involved with the United Farm Workers

union. The Montoya family attended a Hispanic Mennonite church in the area, and Montoya studied at Goshen College, a Mennonite school in Indiana. Montoya’s reconciliation and peace work officially began at Goshen but, he told *Sojourners*, it was in his DNA to be doing this work.

“In my family we’ve always had that connection to organizing, getting people information and trying to educate people about what’s going on,” Montoya said. His work now involves teaching people how restorative justice “can be incorporated in schools, in the community, and even in people’s homes.” But that education can be an uphill battle with teachers trained to view discipline as punitive. For many teachers, suspending a kid or sending them to the principal’s office feels “easier,” Gonzalez and Montoya said.

“We’re trying to get them to understand that with restorative justice there’s an accountability that happens to truly help resolve whatever the conflict was,” Montoya said.

WHAT’S MEDIATION GOT TO DO WITH IT?

After a conflict is identified within a participating school, resolution can go in four possible directions: a participant may rebuff any mediation and choose to accept punishment from an administrator; an administrator may choose how to resolve the conflict; the parties may reach reconciliation without outside intervention; or, most commonly, a trained mediator conducts a mediation session.

When a referral comes to the center, a restorative justice coordinator sets up a mediation with the people in conflict. Mediation brings both parties together for a three-step process. First, harm is acknowledged and recognized. Second, a plan is developed for how to repair the harm. Third, follow-up meetings are planned to ensure success. This process builds trust and strengthens relationships between participants, which helps teachers with classroom management.

But teachers sometimes find it difficult to relinquish their perceived power. “In the mediation process of restorative justice, the power is shared, and it’s equal. The teacher and the student have the same decision-making power in coming up with a solution,” Montoya said.

Brianna Weeks is a health policy specialist who volunteers with the Phoenix Restorative Justice Center. She finds the restorative model’s focus on healing

**MANY NOW
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RIPE FOR REFORM
—OR EVEN
ABOLITION.**

to be pivotal in its appeal. Previously, Weeks worked as a paralegal and served with the U.S. Peace Corps. She became involved in restorative work through Phoenix’s Balsz School District, the center’s first school partner. Afterward, she continued volunteering weekly with Montoya’s team.

“Restorative justice allows for a better understanding of situations that may lead to violence, crime, or misbehavior,” Weeks said. “Not only does it lead to an opportunity to move forward in a healing way—which is what I’ve come to believe justice is about—but it also allows society to learn from the situation and start to grow.”

Traditional student-teacher power dynamics and punitive discipline models often leave students feeling unheard and powerless, according to Weeks. That model is so ingrained in people that even elementary school students come to a mediation with a defensive attitude, fearing it’s just a new way to get them in trouble. In her interviews with students, Weeks finds that the mediation session format makes a positive impression on students.

“The teacher has to repeat back what the student said, in the student’s words, without correction or interfering. That’s extremely powerful for [the students],” Weeks said. “That has been the most transformative part of the process.”

DEEP SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS FOR MENDING COMMUNITY

Mennonite commitment to restorative justice is older than the term itself. The discipline has three main roots, according to Carl Stauffer, a professor at Eastern

Mennonite University and a restorative justice expert: Restorative justice mirrors values, such as communalism and collectivism, found in Indigenous cultures across the globe. Restorative work includes values found in the Abrahamic faiths and other spiritual traditions. And the modern movement traces itself back to the Elmira case and the Mennonites. These three histories form the root system of restorative justice practitioners today.

The Anabaptist tradition, which maintains a nonviolent approach to theology and people, was perfectly suited for introducing restorative practices in modern contexts. In Anabaptist theology, Jesus being crucified on the cross is not a transaction to appease an angry God but instead is a means of redemption and reconciliation. Historically, Anabaptists practiced nonviolent resistance to injustice.

“Anabaptists have always said, ‘What if we understood the cross as God’s desperate attempt to reconcile with us as human beings and to call us out of violence and into nonviolence?’” Stauffer said.

The role of Christians in this tradition is to heal, to be a source of reconciliation and peace in all areas. This ministry is much broader than simply replacing the punitive legal system; it is about a cultural shift. That shift, in part, requires the humility to give up privilege and control.

“[Teachers say,] ‘I’m losing control, I have no control in my classroom,’ and it turns out the opposite is true because [in mediation] they begin to build that respect and accountability with a student,” Montoya said.

BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Montoya and Gonzalez both recognize that the goal of changing a school is also about changing a community. Accessing schools and students provides a pathway to changing other environments. “When you look at restorative justice, part of what you’re trying to do is [get] these youth to understand that they have an obligation to the teacher, to a fellow student, to the school community, and to their community,” Gonzalez said. “What you’re really trying to draw out is empathy.”

“The culture changes in that people feel safer. They feel like there’s accountability. The students start to hold each other accountable; they feel more open to say something when they see something happen,” Montoya said.

In the same way that violence begets

violence, peacemaking can beget peacemaking. “We get a lot of kids who want to be mediators, who have gone through the process. We had a couple of fifth graders who had been in a conflict, and when they were sixth graders they decided they wanted to be mediators, because they saw the benefit of it,” Montoya said.

Angelina Estrada, a sixth grader at Desert Oasis Elementary School in Phoenix, told *Sojourners* that her mediation to resolve a conflict with another student helped her contemplate her actions and communicate her feelings. “Understanding the conflict that is actually happening, you feel more at ease,” Estrada said. “Instead of arguing on top of each other, you state your opinion, you let someone else talk, and you really get heard.”

She said her mediation was led by another Desert Oasis student, as well as a Grand Canyon University student trained in mediation. The lessons she learned from the mediation session have helped her solve other conflicts with classmates and even outside of school.

“You get to know what the other person’s point of view is, and I feel like that helps a lot, because you don’t know what’s going on in someone’s mind,” Estrada said. “A lot of problems have stopped since I’ve been at that mediation. It made me take a step back and look at the things that actually mattered.”

The students aren’t the only ones seeing benefits. Lupita Hightower, superintendent for the Tolleson Elementary School District near Phoenix, said teachers and parents are growing to love the mediation practice. “Going through this process, they realize that asking a student to leave may not help them at all, or meet the educational objective in the process, and that this is actually a lot more beneficial for them to be able to resolve conflict and take accountability,” Hightower said.

The Phoenix center’s work has played a vital part in what advocates hope will be a large-scale transformation from a culture that punishes students to one that seeks their wellbeing. Continuing that change will require more people and more willing communities.

Before the pandemic, Hightower had planned for the center to expand to two other schools in her district, something she has now placed on hold until the next school year. Additionally, Hightower and Gonzalez both sit on the board of trustees for Grand Canyon University, where they have developed a partnership between the education college and the restorative jus-

tice center to train school administrators and students in mediation.

“People like Arthur [Montoya] have to have the bandwidth to at least get it started, then it has to be sustained and continued,” Hightower said.

CHANGING NOTIONS OF JUSTICE

In Western countries, “justice” has become synonymous with punitive discipline. The “criminal justice system”—a web of overlapping jurisdictions from policing to incarceration—purports to prevent and respond to harm. But many now recognize that the whole system is plagued by problems and ripe for reform—or even abolition. Unfortunately, other fields, such as education, have adopted a broken system as their own model for dealing with harm. Restorative justice advocates are introducing language of their own, such as the “criminal legal system,” which recognizes that policing and prisons rarely concern themselves with justice or the restoring of right relationship.

But the critical eye toward language can turn inward as well. For example, practitioners began working away from “victim” and “offender” language, as a recognition that even these terms are limited to legal restraints. Only three years into their work, Gonzalez and Montoya are considering renaming the Phoenix center.

“I really believe it is a transformative justice center,” Gonzalez said. “Because when you restore people and relationships, you’re transforming.” ♦

Mitchell Atencio is a writer and photographer. Originally from Atlanta, he currently lives near Washington, D.C.



FISHING AGA

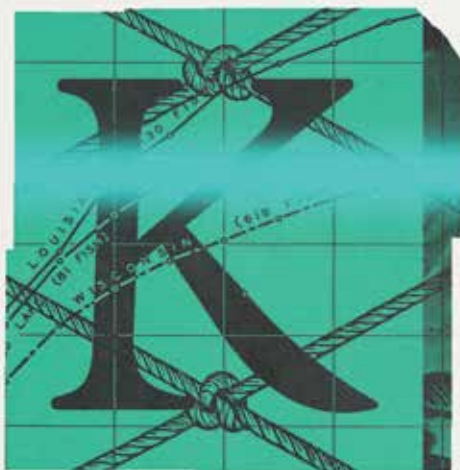


INST EMPIRE

There's a reason why the parables
of Jesus often involved fish.



By Gary Paul Nahban
Illustrations by Ricardo Santos



K.C. Hanson was painfully aware of the disparities in access to resources during Jesus' time, but Hanson also saw the thread of hidden abundance weaving through the parables. Hanson is a scholar who has explored the ecological dimensions of the parables about fish. He thinks like a fisher as much or more than he thinks like a philologist, philosopher, or folklorist. For decades, he resided along the Pacific Seaboard, but earlier in his career, he spent eight years in Minnesota, "the land of 10,000 lakes."

Maybe this period of his life gave him a particular understanding of the burdens of freshwater fishing in the Sea of Galilee. In *The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition*, Hanson lamented that scholars haven't taken the time to explore Galilean fishing apart from the basic observation that four of Jesus' disciples are identified as fishers. But fishing would have had to be a huge part of daily life that indirectly influenced spiritual practice, since it was such a vital part of the region's contributions to the Roman Empire. It gave fishermen their vocabulary for expressing their relationship with the world.

What kind of fish are we talking about? There's *Oreochromis aurea*, the tilapia called "musht," which Christians later nicknamed "Saint Peter's fish." The Sea of Galilee still harbors 18 other native fish and at least nine introduced ones. Among the natives, eight species in addition to the musht belong in the *cichlid* family, including four other tilapia and two freshwater "sardines." All in all, dozens of tons of these sardine-like fish were annually harvested during the life and times of Jesus.

A single carp-like fish called a blenny is still sought after in this freshwater sea, for it is one that has long been popular on the Sabbath and at wedding feasts. The Sea of Galilee also has an Asian killy (or Persian pupfish), one air-breathing catfish (which is edible but not kosher), two loaches, and a few carpels and bleaks.

These fish were skillfully pursued by Galileans, providing a significant commercial fishery for them over the span of more than 2,500 years. The fish were caught with dragnets, seine nets, trammel nets, cast nets, wicker baskets, fish traps of woven branches and reeds, spears, arrows, pronged tridents, hooks, lines, and sinkers.

The catches brought in by families on the Galilean shores were often clandestinely sold, gifted, or bartered on beaches where a boat could moor, and a quick exchange could occur. In that manner, the fishers could evade the tax collectors who wanted to take part of

their catch. The empire mandated that taxable catches destined for export markets must be taken to a single market in a highly prosperous but corrupt village called Magdala. Yes, that's where Mary was from—a place famous for its inequities.

There, the fish were purchased wholesale, salted, and sun-dried, then made into a salty slurry or "pickled" so they could be transported long distances to other hubs of commerce in the Roman Empire. Some of the "pickled" fish and fermented fish slurry were further processed into the iconic fish paste called garum. Clay pots full of garum fish paste could be readily transported all the way to Rome, where it was in great demand.

That was the trouble. Ever since the sea itself had come under the control of the distant empire of the Romans, ordinary fishers as well as the fish stocks they depended on had become impoverished. Hanson says their boats were regulated by the state so that the elite could profit from their labor. Aristocratic families controlled the roads and bridges that fishers used to transport their catch to market, and the duty rates could be up to 5 percent. That was in addition to the bribes and tithes they had to pay to the Herodians who ran the harbors.

These external economic pressures likely forced the anglers to stay out longer in the water and to use more predatory or extractive methods of fishing that threatened the sustainability of the Galilee fisheries. What else could they do? Just to survive and support their families in Galilee, fishers there worked harder and longer merely to stay in the same place.

This is perhaps the greatest injustice that imperial powers can impose on fishers and farmers whose lives depend on the stewardship of resources: They force the fellaheen (workers) to squander the fisheries' resources they rely on for their own sustenance. Soon, the most prized fish are priced out of reach for eating by the very families that brought them out of the sea.

Their burden of debts, taxes, and tariffs pressed them to harvest more fish than what their own ancestors would have ever considered as "an allowable level of take."

WINNOWING

In the spirit of sustainability and compassion and with a view to the future, Jesus told a parable from the edge of a boat. As

Matthew remembered it, Jesus was sitting beside the lake, maybe soaking his feet in the shallows to ease the soreness in them. Before he knew it, a large crowd had gathered around him, hinting that they wanted to hear another story, crowding in upon him so that everyone could hear. He crawled up into the nearest boat so he could look into the eyes of everyone who had gathered. He sat there for a while in silence, making eye contact with each and every person.

Suddenly, the words began to pour out of him like a gushing spring as he offered another parable to all the people who stood enraptured on the shore: "Again, I ask you, what would you say our circle of kinship should be like?" He let them think for a moment, then he began again:

"If you ask me my vision for that heavenly kin-dom / It will be like a fishing net thrown into the water / That miraculously gathers up fish of every kind! / But when a net is that full, the fishers have to do some winnowing. / So, they drag the net full of wriggling fish / Onto the shore, where they sit down among the harvest / To begin to select the fish mature enough to keep / While tossing the immature ones back into the waters / To grow some more, for they are simply not ready.

That is the way it may be at the end of this era. / The sacred messengers will come to gather all who are ready / While deciding which of the others unsure of themselves / Must be tossed back into the perilous waters. / My heart will go out to you when our harvest is sorted out, / For we may hear weeping and the gnashing of teeth, / For some may live on with us, while others may perish. / But do you understand why I wish to caution you? / We must prepare to take care of this bounty."

A GLOBAL FISHING CRISIS

My own family's history has "schools of fish running through it" as a passion and pleasure, but we also witnessed first-hand the decline in fishing livelihoods in our community. While my grandfather "Papa" Ferhat Nabhan was not a fisherman himself, he settled among Swedish fishers when he moved his family from Lebanon to the Great Lakes a century ago. When he was a middle-aged man, he made his living as a produce peddler, but he regularly bartered fruit for fish with his tow-headed neighbors at harbors along



TODAY, WE ARE WITNESSING A GLOBAL CRISIS IN OUR FISHERIES, ONE AFFECTING ARTISANAL FISHERS OF NEARLY EVERY FRESHWATER LAKE IN THE WORLD.

the southern shores of Lake Michigan.

I've met elderly Swedes who claim that Papa kept their families from starving during the Great Depression. He gifted them all the fruits they could eat while paying them well for any yellow perch they had caught so that he could resell them to his more wealthy and elite customers.

But sometime in the 1930s, a predatory fish named the sea lamprey was accidentally introduced into the Great Lakes, as was a small oily fish named the alewife. Their populations grew exponentially, especially those of the lamprey, which ate 40 to 50 pounds of native fish over its lifetime. Soon, the native stocks of perch, sturgeon, and cisco

were so depleted along the shores of the Indiana Dunes that all but one Swedish fishing family abandoned their shacks and boats by the time I was born there.

After the sea lamprey came to dominate the lake's food chain, the alewife population peaked and then collapsed—with millions of stinking carcasses washing up on the lakeshore. No Swedish American family of commercial fishers could make a living on the southern shores of Lake Michigan anymore.

What happened in my family's lakeside village is just one example of a crisis emerging along many shores. Today, we are witnessing a global crisis in our fisheries, one affecting artisanal fishers living along the shores of nearly every sizeable freshwater lake in the world. For many, this crisis remains hidden, but it's real. The "empire" we live within is no less extractive and destructive of creatures such as fish than the Roman Empire that ruled over Jesus.

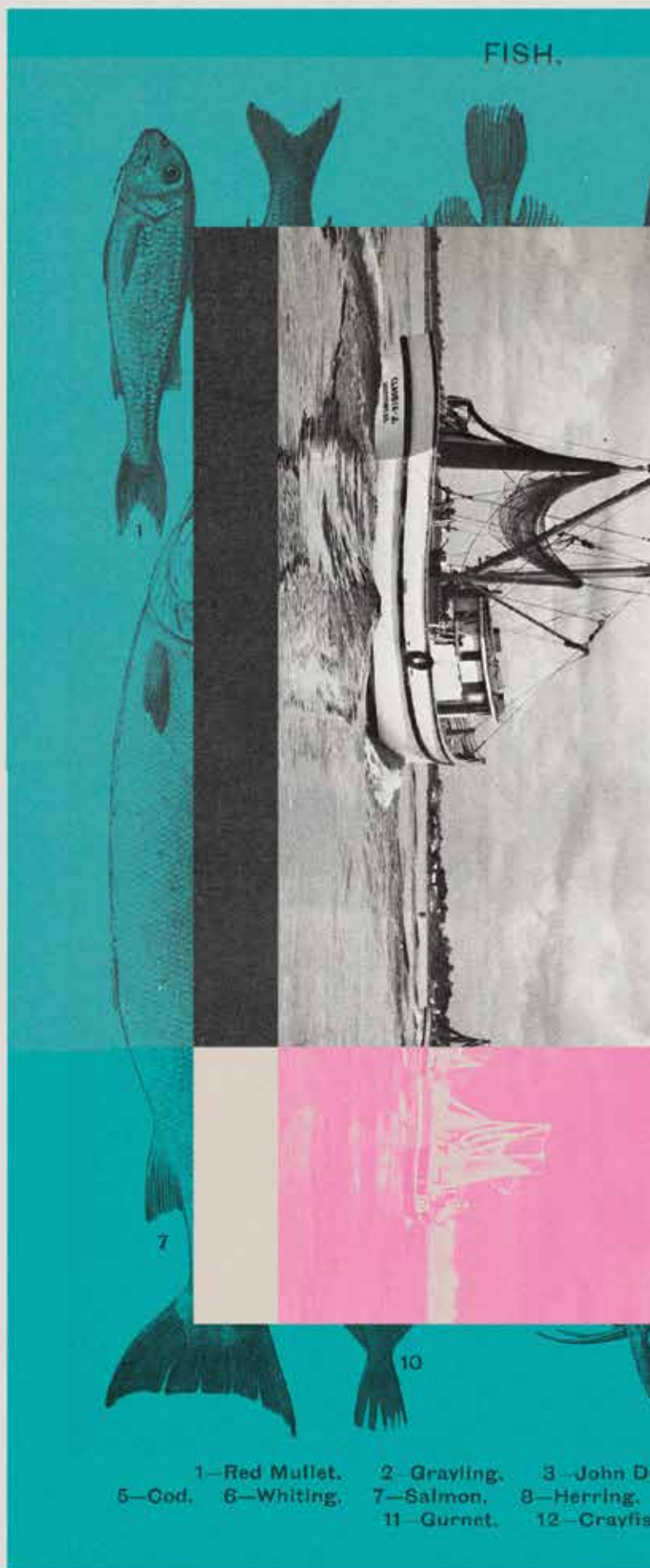
Today, four out of every 10 species of freshwater fish left swimming in the lakes and rivers of the North American continent are facing some level of endangerment. If Simon Peter and his crew were alive today and trying to fish in the freshwater lakes of the United States, would they be able to make a living?

Some, like the Atlantic sturgeon found in Eastern rivers, once reached sizes of 800 pounds. Their swimming power had the sheer force sufficient to tear through fishing nets as if they were tissue paper.

As early as the 1920s, the populations of sturgeon in one river after another blinked out, diminished by overfishing. I have only held two fingerling sturgeons in my hands over decades of visiting Eastern rivers and every Great Lake. As I tossed these survivors back into the waters, I wept and prayed that they might find safe passage away from nets and hooks.

But that is not the half of it.

Most of the once-populous fish in North America have been imperiled by many factors other than the actions of fishers themselves. We have witnessed whitefish and yellow perch precipitously decline by the damming of rivers and draining of wetlands; by the warming and drying weather that depletes water supplies; by the draining of toxins and endocrine-disrupting chemicals from our sewers and croplands into our waterways; and by the spreading of aquatic weeds, diseases, competitors, predators,





and pests that were previously unknown.

Government regulators claim that they have made advances in fishery management and conservation over the past 100 years. That is indeed true to some level. Most of these regulators are well-trained and care deeply about the resources they seek to manage.

Nevertheless, both fish and their fishers are now facing a crisis at least as severe as the one faced by sardines, tilapias, pupfish, bleaks, barbels, and Galileans during the brief fishing careers of Jesus' disciples. However many fish stocks we have safeguarded through the more scientific management of fisheries, we have lost far more through wastefulness, greed, and disregard for the creatures and characters whose lives depend on clean waters. The empire of extraction is swallowing up everything that breathes.

RESTORING ABUNDANT HARVESTS

Many Christians today don't seem too concerned—or are barely aware—that many fish stocks today can no longer make their annual “runs” or migrations that have gone on for millennia. They might ask, What does that have to do with our own spiritual pilgrimages? As if we are the only species that makes sacred journeys in this world!

As theologian Diana Butler Bass reminds us, most ministers routinely use the image of sacred waters in their preaching. But they make barely a single passing note of the global fishing crisis occurring in our rivers, inland lakes, and seas. She says we can do better because “the world’s waterways call us to practice social justice—to restore them, to make sure rich and poor alike have access, and to manage water in drought-stricken lands with creativity and foresight.”

We have an opportunity to make a difference and change how we regard Brother Tilapia and Sister Salmon. And there's no time to lose. According to British fisheries journalist Charles Clover—whom I met on a panel at the international Slow Fish Expo—“We're at the end of the line.” If we don't stop squandering fish stocks, millions of people could starve. Pavan Sukhdev, of the U.N. initiative for greener economies, has warned that if there is not a fundamental restructuring of the global fish industry, we may encounter fish-free oceans and lakes by 2050.

What is a world with such a dearth of fish that children will grow up without ever having felt one wriggling in their hands? One where fish are absent from our lives?

The health of at least a billion people, mostly from poorer countries, who nutritionally depend on fish and shellfish as their main animal protein sources would be at risk. And that's why efforts to restore their coastal, estuarine, and riverine nursery grounds give me so much hope. Where my wife and I spend time on the Gulf of California coast of Mexico, we are assisting the Comcáac Indian fishing communities in restoring mangrove lagoons and seagrass beds. That's where dozens of finfish and shellfish mate, have babies, and feed. A single hectare of restored healthy mangrove habitat—hardly two and a half acres—brings \$30,000 of edible fish and shellfish back to Gulf waters, in addition to hundreds of other nonedible but ecologically important species. The replanting of mangroves and eelgrass beds also creates jobs for youth. It is one of many means to offer long-term care for the bounty of fish.

Just as Jesus found fish in a place where his Galilean friends had given up thinking they could ever bring in an ample catch again, all of us can pray and work toward restoring abundant harvests wherever we live. ✱

Gary Paul Nabhan, an Ecumenical Franciscan brother, agrarian activist, and MacArthur Fellow, holds the W.K. Kellogg Chair in Southwest Borderlands Food and Water Security at the University of Arizona. This article is adapted with permission from *Jesus for Farmers and Fishers: Justice for All Those Marginalized by Our Food System*, © 2021 Broadleaf Books.



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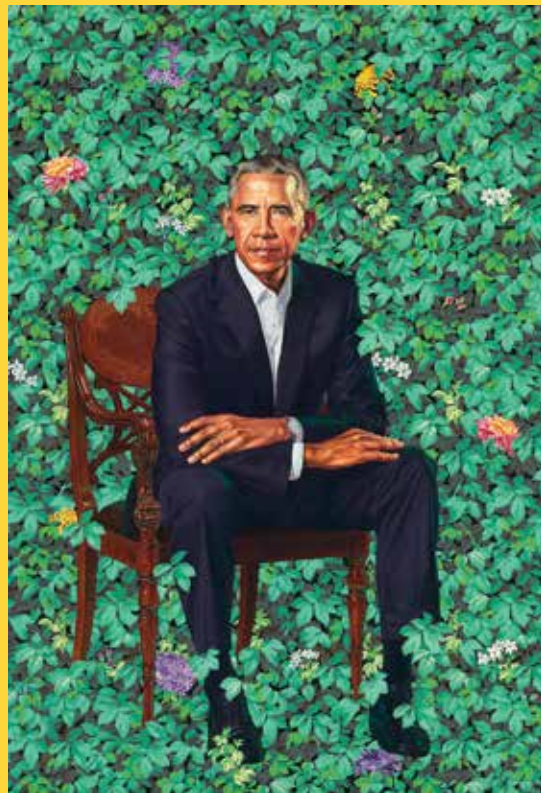
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PRESIDENTIAL PORTRAITURE, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, CONCEALS AS MUCH AS IT REVEALS.



I

It's unlikely that Donald Trump is fretting over his presidential portrait. With further legal troubles and several industries turned against him, the man has bigger fish to fry. But as we've learned time and time again through

Visual
Art

the ravages of the coronavirus and police violence, just because Trump isn't worried about something doesn't mean it doesn't matter. The un-

confirmed, though expected, portrait offers a chance for him to shape a legacy that is in dire need of salvaging. Trump's painting could serve to underscore—or attempt to elide—the unconventional nature of his time in office, potentially adding a glossy filter to a difficult period in American history. Of course, filtering is more than part



and parcel of portraiture. It's the very nature of the job.

Throughout the centuries, portraiture has been the province of the wealthy and, despite its biographical nature, is a genre that conceals nearly as much as it reveals. Louis XIV, another larger-than-life leader, exhibits this multiplicity of meaning all too well in his portraits. Painter Charles Poerson clothes Louis XIV in the garb of Jupiter—complete with lightning bolts in hand—to signify his victory over a series of nobility uprisings known as the Fronde. By shrouding the king's humanity, Poerson makes Louis into someone divine, armed with greater might than mere mortals. Who needs the *imago dei* when you can simply be God? A different portrait replaces the gouty king's legs with the calves of a younger man. In short, the sovereign portrait is synonymous with a kind of psychological *trompe l'oeil*, created to preserve power and project glory. American presidential portraits differ in their ends, though they are invested in other kinds of self-delusion: equality and equanimity.

The tradition of presidents' portraits, often in oil paint, traces back to George Washington's time in office and grew to accommodate first spouses. There are some exceptions to the stoic faces and banal backgrounds of the portraits, such as the meme-worthy painting of Eleanor Roosevelt that features several iterations of her face, and Bill Clinton's unofficial portrait by Chuck Close, showing him in vivid detail while simultaneously abstracting his genial expression, his face appearing as if hidden behind shower glass—fitting for a president whose charm obscured more sinister aspects of his personality. But perhaps bland paintings (ignoring Kehinde Wiley's Obama jungle) are the birthright of our political system.

Lest we be fooled by the all-too-prevalent McMansion, I would like to suggest that America is not a country

that values glamour or ostentation. The utility of our aesthetic taste is part of the trade-off we make for a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer famous for his analysis of America's nascent democratic system, noted "if there be less splendor than in the halls of an aristocracy, the contrast of misery will be less frequent also." Not having a monarchy means less pomp in portraiture, but it also means that our leaders are tasked with appearing as though they are one of us. The charisma of the Kennedys certainly superseded this responsibility, as did Lincoln's gravitas, but in their stories we see fragments of America, and by that light, fragments of who we could be. There's beauty in this steadiness and humility. Unfortunately, this beauty is about to be shattered by a former president who believed himself above common decency and the law. This begs the question: Should he get a portrait?

Our presidents were not perfect. Many of the men elected to the "highest office in the land" committed some of the lowest acts. Owning slaves. Displaying brutality against Indigenous people. Instigating immoral wars. And so on. To paraphrase a decontextualized Sen. Lindsey Graham, if we were to deny Trump a portrait, we might have very few left. I don't know if that would be a bad thing. Considering the image of God each person bears, however, there is something that feels right about the presidential portrait as an acknowledgement of an awful, exhilarating position held with duty and honor.

Objects with Trump's face on them are nothing new. From the baby blimp to squeeze toys to caricatures galore, he's got a face people love to hate—and distribute. Will his portrait be a chance for him to reclaim the dignity he forsook by way of his mafioso-esque dealings (and stripped from others)? Or will it orange-wash a disastrous presidency? We'll simply have to wait until the writing—or rather, the painting—is on the wall. ❖

**THERE'S BEAUTY IN
THIS STEADINESS
AND HUMILITY.
UNFORTUNATELY,
THIS BEAUTY IS
ABOUT TO BE
SHATTERED.**

Faith-Marie Zamblé is an artist, writer, and M.F.A. candidate in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism at the Yale School of Drama.



On Screen

New & Noteworthy

HONEST WORK

By Da'Shawn Mosley

I

In middle school I emailed CBS and asked them to make a teen version of their reality show *Big Brother*, in the hope that they would cast me and I could schmooze and deceive my peers to win the contest's \$500,000 prize. Schmooze and deceive weren't my bright ideas:

They formed a strategy I had seen succeed on previous seasons of *Big Brother* and *Survivor*, as clueless heroes were undone by ruthless, money-hungry, victorious villains. Even CBS' clean-fun competition *The Amazing Race* had enabled contestants to backstab another team for \$1 million.

So it's unexpected that the network's newer prime-time contest *Tough as Nails* plays to kinder rules—and that it has become part of my mostly drama-filled viewing habits. Twelve Americans with some of the most strenuous jobs that exist (welder, farmer, firefighter, ironworker, and more) vie in team and individual challenges to see who's the hardest and smartest worker. As an artsy guy whose most physically demanding professional activity is typing, I would not have pictured myself in the *Tough as Nails* fan base. And yet, here I am.

Phil Keoghan, host of *The Amazing Race*, produces *Tough as Nails* alongside his wife and producing partner Louise Keoghan, Andy Thomas, and others. Keoghan's intent for the program is clear. "There's lots of shows out there that honor people that are really good at singing and dancing and are good looking," he told *Deadline*, "but I felt that there was a place for acknowledging

those people who keep a country running. Real people in real life who are real tough."

Airing when essential workers, at great risk to themselves, are keeping a COVID-19-stricken U.S. going, *Tough as Nails* couldn't be timelier. It contrasts with other reality show contests in its elimination process: There isn't one. Or rather, there's a \$200,000 grand prize for the winner of a series of individual competitions, but those defeated along the way don't leave the show. Instead, they remain for team competitions throughout the season, with the winning team for each contest splitting a cash prize. The required teamwork nearly eliminates the possibility of villainy, especially in combination with participants' evident respect for one another as workers trying to make an honest living.

I am definitely not asking CBS to book me for the next season. I would never qualify to be on this show, but we all probably know plenty of folks who would. What they're capable of is a wonder. Gifts as divine as theirs deserve an audience.

Da'Shawn Mosley is associate editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

From *Tough As Nails*

FUTURE SOUL

Virtuoso keyboardist Cory Henry's 2020 album *Something to Say* encapsulates a trying year—traversing elation and sorrow. He brings Herbie Hancock-worthy skill and range to what he calls "future soul." Featuring the Funk Apostles on four tracks, this self-produced project is required listening. **Henry House Entertainment**



A Divine Puzzle

Author and public theologian Grace Ji-Sun Kim's essays read as meditations in her newest book, *Hope in Disarray: Piecing Our Lives Together in Faith*. Sifting through today's complex array of personal and societal injustices, Kim approaches readers with the gift of generative hope.

The Pilgrim Press



(Un)Familiar Terrain

Theologies of Land: Contested Land, Spatial Justice, and Identity features Palestinian, First Nations, South African, and Latinx authors who consider relationships between humanity, land, and domination, centering theologies often missing from the repertoire of the "Global North." Edited by K.K. Yeo and Gene L. Green.

Cascade Books

sojo.net

41

TRIBUNES OF CIVILITY?

By Danny
Duncan Collum



Eyes & Ears

Like the French police officer in *Casa-blanca* who was “shocked, shocked” to find gambling in Rick’s Cafe, in the wake of the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, social media companies were “shocked”

to discover violent anti-Semitic and white nationalist agitators lurking in plain sight on their platforms. With their usual earnest hypocrisy, the companies took action, banning tens of thousands of groups and individuals from the social media universe. Facebook and YouTube suspended Donald Trump’s accounts. Twitter permanently banned him.

Never mind that in the preceding days and weeks those same social media platforms hosted the planning for Jan. 6, or that for years they have profited from a business model that ignores truth and promotes outrage. But when some of their more unruly customers got off the leash and started threatening the people who write antitrust laws, Facebook, Google, and Twitter suddenly became tribunals of civility.

Of course, such monumental hypocrisy from Big Tech gave many Republican politicians the opportunity to change the subject from their own possible complicity in the insurrection to what they claim is suppression of free speech by the liberals in Silicon Valley. To this, clever liberals have replied that the First Amendment only applies to government, not to private corporations.

Lost in all this tit for tat is this one self-evident truth: A media universe in which anyone can say anything to everyone, without filters or gatekeepers, is simply not viable.

The real issue in the debate about social media censor-

PUBLIC UTILITIES MUST BE SUBJECT TO PUBLIC CONTROL.

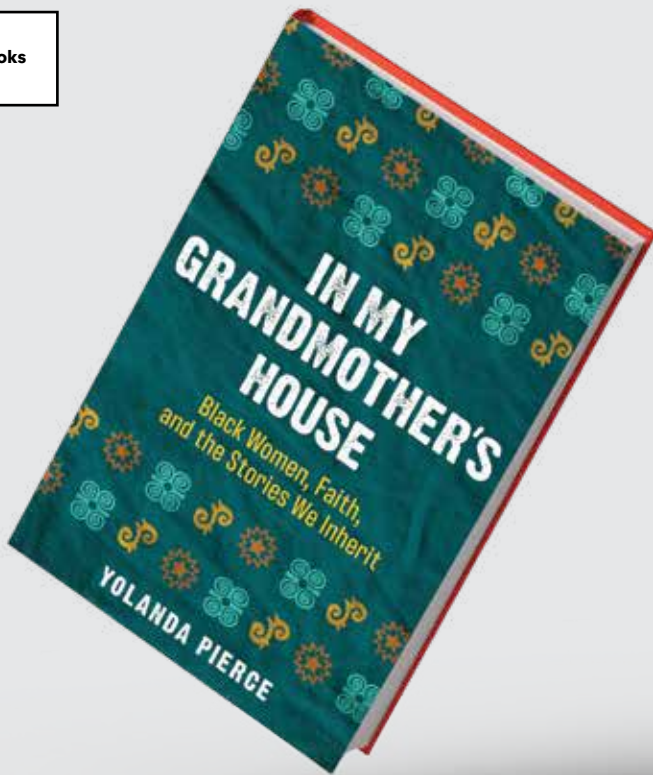
ship is *not* whether, or to what degree, free speech protections in the U.S. Constitution can apply to private, nongovernmental entities. Historically, courts have veered all over the map on that question. The real issue is how ubiquitous privately owned public utilities can be compelled to serve the public interest.

History suggests that those utilities must be subject to some form of public control. There is even a precedent for this that is directly applicable to the questions raised about free speech and social media today. Early in the 20th century, when radio and television first emerged as mass media, there was widespread concern that, in the wrong hands, they could become instruments for demagoguery and deception. The federal government responded by creating the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which issued licenses to broadcasters. Those renewable licenses came with requirements to devote a certain amount of time to commercial-free public interest programming, to provide roughly balanced coverage of public issues, and to provide equal time to voices on all sides of any public controversy.

This wasn’t a perfect system. It resulted in a lot of bland, risk-avoidant programming, but it never left us with a situation like at least one-third of our population believing the lie that the 2020 presidential election was rigged and stolen. Regulation of social media in the public interest will require different sets of tools than the ones used for broadcast media, but it can be done if the public wants it badly enough.

The Biden administration could put the public interest first on this issue, but don’t bet on it. As this is written, there are reports that Biden’s selected attorney general, Merrick Garland, is planning to appoint a lawyer who once defended Facebook in an anti-competition lawsuit to be the head of the Department of Justice’s antitrust division. ✖

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



HOW DOES ONE PRACTICE THIS FAITH AS A BLACK WOMAN IN AMERICA?

In the preface, Pierce describes her book as “a work of Grandmother theology,” a womanist theology that draws on the generational wisdom of older Black women and provides a different way to know God. With the childhood stories she tells, Pierce seems to identify her grandmother Vivian—the woman who raised her, served faithfully in the church, and whose home displayed a portrait of a Black Jesus—as the primary theologian in her life. In a culture that so often elevates the thoughts and analysis of white, male theologians, to read and reflect upon the lessons that Pierce learned from her grandmother and her church mothers makes an impact, lessons that continue to inform how she lives today.

And yet, the tension remains, with Pierce’s book continually returning to the question: How do we practice a faith that both loves what is good in the church and refuses to bow down to, or ignore, the very real, oppressive, and harmful structures and mentalities that persist in the church? For Pierce, myself, and

many others, this question comes with an additional twist: How does one practice this faith as a Black woman living in America?

In a current-day context that finds our nation in the wake of an insurrection born of white supremacy and Christian nationalism, and in the midst of what statistical evidence reveals as a growing movement of younger generations away from the church, Pierce’s question is relevant. Pierce offers no simple answers, but bids us to wrestle with this question, and, in doing so, find ways to bring to fruition the potential of what the church can be. Pierce sums it up nicely with these words: “I try to bring to life a living and breathing faith that has sustained generations of my forebearers, even as I challenge aspects of the faith that have failed me or caused me to doubt.” May that be our mission as well. ✦

Rebecca Riley is a writer and filmmaker in California.

MOTHERS OF THE FAITH

In My Grandmother's House:
Black Women, Faith, and the Stories
We Inherit, by Yolanda Pierce

Broadleaf Books

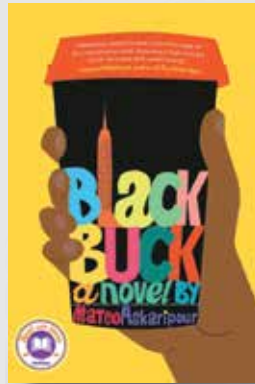
Sometimes I wonder if my “Black card” is in jeopardy. The main source of this concern is that my encounters with the Black church are few, the most consistent being the yearly family viewing of the 1996 film *The Preacher’s Wife*, though even I know the brevity of that movie’s scripted sermons is far from accurate. My few in-person Black church experiences taught me the basics: Wear your Sunday best, and expect the service to be long. But beyond that, the Black church has always been a bit of a mystery to me, a place that has never felt familiar.

Yolanda Pierce’s *In My Grandmother’s House* provides an intimate entry into this world. From tarry nights and foot washing to patriarchal structures, Pierce details her experiences and invites the reader into the tension of celebrating the beautiful aspects of the Brooklyn Holiness-Pentecostal church of her youth while also laying bare the ways in which that church, and the Black church at large, has failed to be the loving and inclusive body it professes to be.

WHERE THERE WASN'T ONE BEFORE

Black Buck,
by Mateo Askaripour

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt



I

In his debut novel *Black Buck*, Mateo Askaripour tackles race in the world of startups. Doubling as a kind of self-help manual for Black people in sales, the novel's structure and tone allow it to hold multitudes: the dark, the hopeful, the comical, the horrific. But at its heart, this is also a novel about community.

We meet Darren, a 22-year-old shift supervisor at Starbucks who lives with his mother in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, New York. They're not poor, he insists, pointing to the home his mother owns. But this doesn't negate the harsh conditions she is exposed to at her factory job. Still, life is good—and if a day is not “good,” then at least he can come home to a warm dinner with his mother, girlfriend, best friend, and the neighbor who is practically family. Darren would be content, if not for a few reminders that he could aim higher, achieve *more*. He was, after all, valedictorian of his class at the Bronx School of Science.

Enter Rhett, the charismatic CEO of Sumwun, a startup located on the 36th floor of the building where Darren works. When Darren smoothly attempts to sell Rhett a new drink, Rhett sees his potential and recruits him. This is how Darren becomes Buck, the first Black man at Sumwun. Racist shenanigans ensue, popular among them: Has anyone told Darren that he looks like Martin Luther King Jr.? Sidney Poitier? Dave Chapelle? Against a background of overt racism, appropriation, and consumerism, the cult-like culture of Sumwun is unforgiving. Meanwhile, the company's mission is opaque, rife with danger and risk. What impact are they really making? Are they helping anyone? Where is all the money coming from?

Buck does not get a moment to dwell on these questions. He is overworked and overwhelmed, his brutal and absurd training made worse by Clyde, his white supremacist boss. And yet, somehow, Buck makes it through. He catches the startup fever, closes deal after deal, and

there are allies on the other side, cheering him on.

One of the key features of *Black Buck* is the juxtaposition of doom and success: The higher Buck rises, the more he loses. The more bizarre the plot gets, the more real it feels. Because reality is also bizarre. Because *Black Buck* is about being the “only one” in an American institution: the only Black person in a department, the only person of color in a room where race is cool until it is inconvenient. And yet, the only way out is forward. For Buck, this means setting out to truly diversify the world of tech, forging a path where there wasn't one before.

“Once you learn how to sell,” he tells us, “to truly sell, anything is possible.”

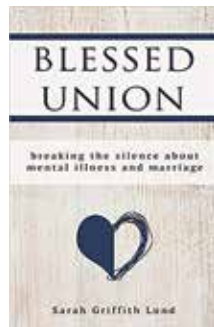
And what is he selling? Freedom, he says. “Not money, power, the need to prove myself, or even to make Ma proud, but the freedom to breathe where I want, when I want, how I want, and with whom I want in my beautiful brown skin.”

Elinam Agbo earned an M.F.A. from the University of Michigan Helen Zell Writers' Program. Born in Ghana, she grew up in the U.S. Midwest.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

An excerpt from *Blessed Union*:
Breaking the Silence about
Mental Illness and Marriage,
by Sarah Griffith Lund

Chalice Press



Over lunch, I asked Monique what I thought was a philosophical question about marriage and mental illness. The conversation turned personal very quickly, however.

Monique shared with me that her vision for her marriage is to flourish, knowing both she and her partner have mental illness. She said flourishing for their marriage happens when they are up front with each other about their mental health status, can state their needs, and can get the support they need.

I listened in awe as Monique described how her marriage has a wellness plan in place for any time one partner becomes sick. I knew about wellness plans for individuals, but to have one for a marriage was a new concept for me. She said the plan simply goes into effect when the need arises, with no pressure for the sick partner to “snap out of it.” The person is allowed to be sick. Given the permission to be sick, they can then work on getting healthier without shame, judgment, or stigma. The plan is brilliant and seems to be working well for their marriage.

During these times, the couple rely on therapists, close friends, and circles of additional support. They realize that it is unfair to expect each other to fulfill all of each other's emotional needs. Monique and her partner figured out a way to remove the frustration, burden, and disappointment by taking this unrealistic expectation off the altar. ✕

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SOJOURNERS

EASTER

By Devon Balwit



Keep your eyes on your work. Looking
at a dogwood does not make you blossom.

Nor can a bridge of sighs span an ocean
of despair. For that, you need oars

and strong arms. Labor as long
as it is still called today. Yes, Faith

could have worn other metaphors,
but instead it rose from the dead

and asked questions: Why are you
crying? Who are you looking for?

Do not fear. Answer. The Risen One
speaks your language.

Devon Balwit, author of *Rubbing Shoulders With the Greats*, lives in Portland, Ore.



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SOJOURNERS

WHAT DOES RESURRECTION MEAN?

Reflections on
the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle B

By Isaac S. Villegas



Living the Word

"They were afraid." Those are the last words of the earliest manuscripts of Mark's gospel (16:8)—the oldest of the four gospels. Mark ends his story about Jesus with Mary Magdalene, Mary the

mother of James, and Salome at the empty tomb. Terror seizes them. They flee in shocked silence. The end. What kind of Easter is this?

Scribes and theologians thought the same, so a couple centuries later they added different endings to Mark—easier endings, with Jesus coming back to offer further teachings. In Mark's original Easter account, however, there is no resolution to the story. Instead, we read about three women at a tomb, bewildered. Here, resurrection doesn't resolve anything. Instead, the event unsettles. The absence of a corpse provokes questions and invites a hope in the promise of unimaginable possibility. "Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee," a strange messenger in the empty tomb tells them, "there you will see him."

Easter is an ending without a conclusion, a story without finality. The end returns us back to the beginning—to Galilee, where Jesus was born, where he was baptized, where he gathered disciples, where he healed the sick, fed the hungry, and preached good news. Resurrection means that nothing, not even death, will prevent Jesus' invitation for us—who are weak and fearful, bewildered by a world we can't control—to follow messengers who guide into the mysteries of Christ in the here and now.

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship and president of the governing board of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

JESUS SURPRISES THE GUILTY WITH AN OFFER OF PEACE.

APRIL 4

GRANDMOTHER'S TABLE

ISAIAH 25:6-9; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24;
ACTS 10:34-43; MARK 16:1-8

"The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food," Isaiah proclaims (25:6). He prophesies a heavenly banquet: chairs crowded around a table, plates and bowls piled high with food, with God as a host. God's like *mi abuelita* (my grandmother), who would always have an olla on the stove, boiling chicken for her arroz con pollo. I'd show up in the afternoon with my sister, and my grandma would spoon hefty portions of arroz con pollo into bowls for us. I'd show up in the evening with my cousins, and she'd serve us arroz con pollo before we went out for the night. At her house, when visitors stopped by, she would insist that they sit down for a feast. Her table belonged to her family, and to all the guests who became family.

Her kitchen was a glimpse of "the kingdom of God," as *mujerista* theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz puts it. She describes *la comunidad de fe* as *la familia de Dios*—the community of faith as the family of God—where we are all kin. "For us Latinas," Isasi-Díaz explains, "salvation refers to having a relationship with God, a relationship that does not exist if we do not love our neighbor." God's salvation looks like my grandmother's house, where there's always room around the table for another neighbor, another stranger, another guest, as God expands our vision of who are our kin. At God's table we learn how to belong to one another, we learn how to love each other, we experience the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food ... let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation" (verse 6, 9). Salvation is a meal, an unending communion feast. God is like *mi abuelita*, who has already prepared a place for you at her table.

APRIL 11

EASTER ECONOMICS

ACTS 4:32-35; PSALM 133; 1 JOHN 1:1-2:2; JOHN 20:19-31

Omnia sunt communia (all things in common). That was the rallying cry of Anabaptist communities throughout Europe in the early part of the 16th century. They took the slogan from the Latin translation of Acts 4:32, where we read about the first congregations organizing themselves as proto-communist communities: “No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.”

The book of Acts documents how the gospel changes the way people understand their property. Jesus’ resurrection instigates new economic relations. When the early Anabaptists lived into this Easter call, they were persecuted. Swiss authorities condemned their lives of faith with threats of punishment. A suppression decree from Zurich in 1527 stated, “[Anabaptists] hold and say that no Christian may either give or receive interest or income on capital, and that all temporal goods are free and common and everyone can have full property rights to them.” Their economic practices were deemed heretical. In 1571, the Church of England denounced Anabaptists for their Christian economics. “The riches and goods of Christians are not common,” the Book of Common Prayer still holds, “as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast.”

This Anabaptist economic tradition has evolved into Mennonite commitments to mutual aid, where congregations such as mine set aside a line in our budgets for the redistribution of funds—“From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs,” as Karl Marx wrote. These verses from Acts describe the economic effects of resurrection. Easter faith was a communal life dependent on the abundance of God, the same God who provided manna in the wilderness, where each gathered according to their need (Exodus 16:16-21).

APRIL 18

ENFLESHED PEACE

ACTS 3:12-19; PSALM 4; 1 JOHN 3:1-7; LUKE 24:36-48

Ghosts haunt the living to avenge those who’ve been wronged. They represent the unfinished business of the dead. As the writer of Luke’s gospel alludes: “They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost” (24:37). The disciples are convinced that this figure of Jesus in their midst is a phantom, there to settle the score, because they are guilty. Only a few days earlier, they’d abandoned Jesus. They had deserted their friend in his time of need—even denying that they knew him. On that first Easter, at dusk, in the city where Jesus was killed, within walking distance from his grave, the disciples find themselves with a presence. And they are terrified.

“At first they saw Jesus as a manifestation of death,” Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe preached on this resurrection account. “They have to learn that he is a manifestation of life.” Jesus tries to calm his friends with a reassurance that he hasn’t come with a grudge. “Jesus stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’” (verse 36). The friends need evidence, so Jesus first shows them his wounds; then he has them watch him eat—all as proof of his bodiliness, his aliveness. “For a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (verse 39).

Jesus does all that he can to convince his friends that he is not a ghost on a mission of vengeance. “Repentance and forgiveness,” he says, for all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem, the city where he was killed, where the crowds turned on him and his disciples deserted him (verse 47). Jesus returns to the site of his betrayal, to the people who renounced him, in order to announce forgiveness. He won’t let the forces of alienation and death govern his life. Instead, Jesus surprises the guilty with an offer of peace.

**SALVATION IS A MEAL,
AN UNENDING
COMMUNION FEAST.**

APRIL 25

HUMAN SCAPEGOATS

ACTS 4:5-12; PSALM 23; 1 JOHN 3:16-24; JOHN 10:11-18

Peter confronts the leaders of his people with a truth about themselves and their society: *You killed Jesus*, who was “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders” (Acts 4:11). The authorities, these builders of society, turned Jesus into a scapegoat in their attempt to maintain power. In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, literary philosopher René Girard describes the scapegoat mechanism as a ritual “to transfer onto an animal everything likely to poison relations between members of the community.” Girard continues, “The effectiveness of the ritual was the idea that the sins were expelled with the goat and then the community was rid of them.” The sacrifice attempts to restore order and reinvest administrators of the law with control over an unruly population.

That world is our world. We too organize our lives according to systems of governance that banish members of our communities to prisons—their punishment as a ritual of expiation to redeem our social body from crime. “Criminal justice” is another name for the scapegoat mechanism. Lawmakers and enforcers reassure us that they’ll preserve the common good, if we will stand aside while they snatch and incarcerate our neighbors.

The death penalty pushes the scapegoat function of our punitive society to the extreme, which exposes the violent impulse at the heart of U.S. domestic power. “Congress has expressly authorized the death penalty,” said then-Attorney General William Barr as he announced his desire to resume executions during the Trump administration. “The Justice Department upholds the rule of law.”

The execution of Jesus puts us all on notice. The law is lawless. The rulers are unruly. Societies demand bloodletting. We have grown comfortable with systems of punishment that promise us safety if only we’re willing to make some sacrifices. ❖

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



(UN)HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

By Ed Spivey Jr.

Can we just say right now that Ted Cruz will never be president of the United States? Can we say it out loud? Okay, great. I just wanted to get that out of the way before we move on.

This March brought an anniversary that few of us welcomed and none will celebrate. It's been a year of downs: shutdowns, hunker downs, spend downs, and the down comforters some of us have started wearing around the house, having given up any lingering commitment to outerwear that can't simply be dragged off the bed in the morning. Like robed and aging monarchs of diminished means, we stalk our indoor world with a queen-sized blanket dragging behind us over floors that, if you look on the bright side, are getting a good wipe down.

My own experience has been different since I actually have to leave the house in the morning to go to work. Despite the yearlong shutdown that caused my 45 colleagues to work from home, I need the high-speed internet connection for the magazine's large graphic files. So, for the past year I've been doing something of my own invention. I call it: "Working from work."

It's a disconcertingly quiet 9 to 5(ish), with my primary human contact being the cleaning crew that comes in every two weeks. Despite less need for them, *Sojourners* is committed to supporting our local vendors, including trash pickup and cleaning, but neither crew wishes to speak at length with a lonely man who rushes gleefully toward them when they arrive. And the cleaning crew has projectile Lysol to keep me at a safe distance. ("The only way to stop a bad guy with a grin is a good woman with a spray bottle.") Sometimes the only sound I hear in the office is when I walk by our copy

A YEAR OF WORKING DILIGENTLY, BUT UNSUPERVISED. SO, WHO CAN TELL?

machine, a motion-sensitive device that bleeps awake, lights flashing and eager to make a copy. Which no one needs it to do. (Sorry, sad little robot friend. But do you have plans for lunch?)

Working alone, whether at home or at an empty office, we're all experiencing a slow erosion of basic social skills, no longer stifling belches, covering our yawns, or shaving more than monthly. Our habits are beginning to resemble those of the animal kingdom, but with less nudity and accountability. And it's hard to maintain a sense of purpose. Which is why I sometimes wander the empty halls of my office—quietly tiptoeing past the copy machine—flushing toilets and running the faucets to keep bacteria at bay and searching for the secret snack drawers of my colleagues. After a year, I can report that the drawers are no longer secret, and contain no snacks.

Fortunately, we've been able to preserve our professional connections through Zoom, an innovative technology that enables colleagues to stay in touch with each other's upper bodies, as well as regrettable home decor visible in the background (somewhere there's a Motel 6 that's missing a painting). I also enjoy that humorous moment when colleagues take a drink, and their entire face is briefly obscured by their coffee mugs. I call them Mug Heads. Ha-ha! (Did I mention that a sharp sense of humor also deteriorates during isolation?)

I confess that, during lengthy Zoom meetings, I sometimes violate the unwritten rules of online behavior by placing my cursor under the chin of a staff member on screen and saying, "Tickle tickle." This amuses me. Although—and you might want to jot this down—your microphone should definitely be on mute before you make ad hoc observations, such as, "Hey, look who's having a bad hair day!" or "Well, that's a dumb idea." Because some people can't handle the truth. ✱

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of *Sojourners* magazine.

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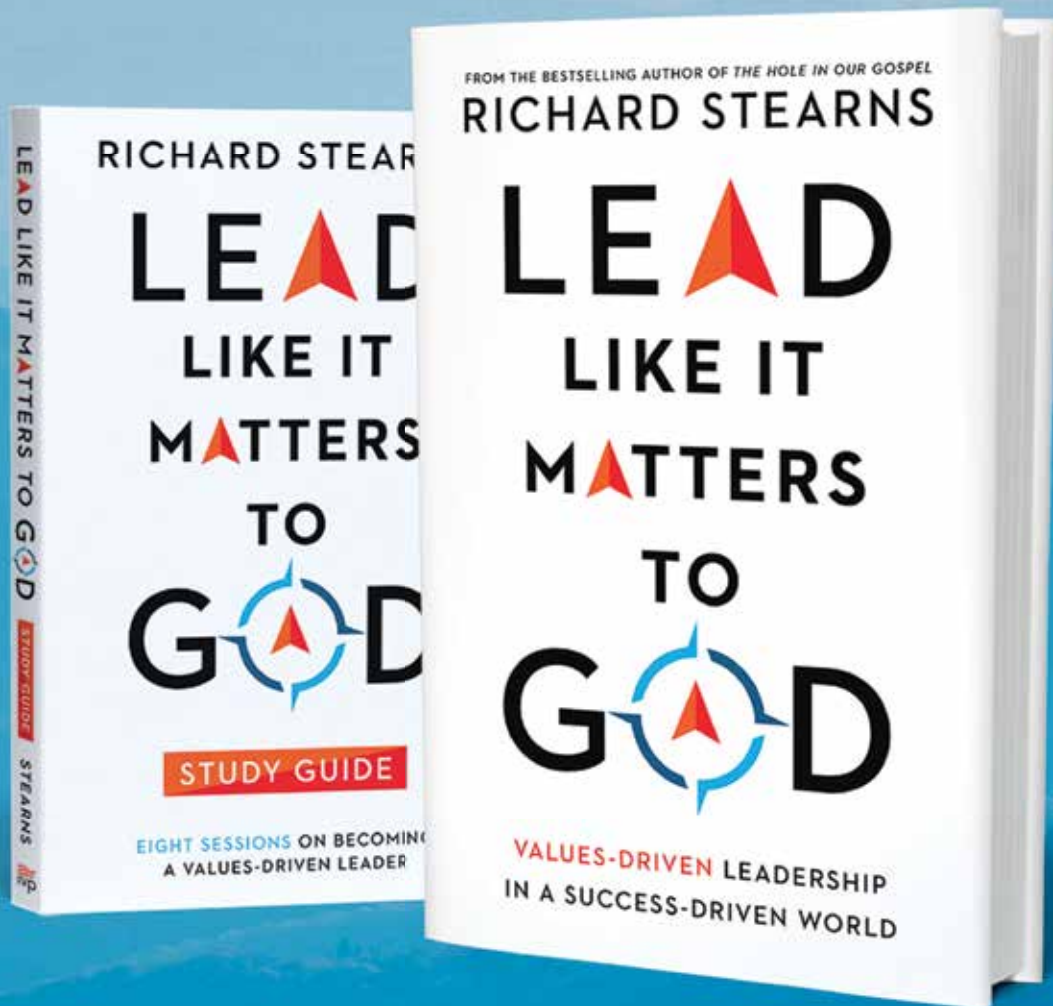
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is president emeritus of World Vision US, where he served as president for twenty years. Before leading the Christian

relief and development organization, he was a corporate CEO at both Parker Brothers and Lenox. His bestselling book *The Hole in Our Gospel* was named the 2010 Christian Book of the Year.

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